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of Ontario**

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Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 28 November 2006

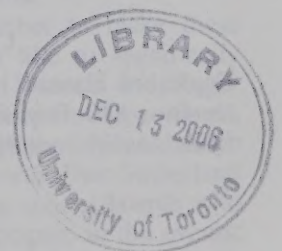
Mardi 28 novembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 28 November 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 28 novembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EGG PRODUCERS

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): It's shaping up to be supply management week here in the Ontario Legislature. I'm pleased to report that the Egg Farmers of Ontario were here this morning for their annual breakfast. I had cheese, tomatoes and mushrooms in my omelette—delicious.

There are 430 egg producers and pullet growers in Ontario, producing 200 million dozen eggs annually. Egg farmers operate within a system, as we know, called supply management. At a time when nearly all farm commodities are in crisis, the supply-managed sectors continue to be the foundation of our rural economy. However, our egg farmers are worried about trade negotiations that might jeopardize supply management.

Last winter, John Tory and the entire Progressive Conservative caucus signed the FarmGate5 petition in support of supply management. Since then we've gained two new MPPs, both of whom have signed online.

We are dismayed with the internal divisions within the McGuinty caucus over supply management. Minister Smitherman and his 31 Liberal followers are still refusing to sign the FarmGate5 petition despite the appeal, as recently as yesterday, from Lisa MacLeod, the member for Nepean–Carleton.

On behalf of John Tory and the entire PC caucus, we salute Ontario's egg producers and we urge George Smitherman and his fellow anti-farmers to support supply management.

LANDFILL

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): On the heels of the Liberals passing their Clean Water Act, ministry approvals were given to the design and operation of site 41, a landfill that's to sit atop an Ontario aquifer that holds some of the purest water on earth. The timing of these approvals, to put it mildly, rings of irony. It's also in keeping with how Liberals make decisions that contravene the precautionary principle, a measure they refused to incorporate into the Clean Water Act.

The landfill, located northwest of Barrie near Wyevalle, is set to open in the fall of 2007. Water from the aquifer was tested at the University of Heidelberg's

internationally renowned clean lab, which is capable of detecting even the slightest impurities in water. Results suggested that the groundwater underlying the proposed site for this landfill could be among the cleanest groundwater on earth. For example, lead levels were found to be below those in Arctic ice cores dating back 5,000 years—but perhaps not for long.

In addition to legislation around source water protection lacking requirements to follow the precautionary principle, this government has failed to follow through with its pledge to divert 60% of waste from landfill. There is still time to act now on a variety of fronts, starting with passing legislation that disqualifies site 41 from being a landfill site on the basis of source water protection.

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATIONS

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): I am pleased to announce that OFSAA recently hosted their cross-country running championships in Thunder Bay. The event was a major success and included over 1,500 registered runners with over 300 coaches, making it one of the largest one-day sporting events ever held in Thunder Bay.

As you are probably aware, OFSAA is an organization comprised of student athletes, teacher coaches, principals and sports administrators who are all committed to the philosophy of education through school sport. Ontario students who participate in OFSAA championships can use the opportunity to deal with issues such as drug-free sport, equity, fair play and safe schools.

Over 170 volunteers came together to make these championships a success. I would like to specifically recognize the co-convenors, David Pineau and Roger Slomke; organizing committee members Don Grant, Clarke Loney, Andrea North, Bryan Nunan, Rob Murphy, Alicyn Papich, Kip Sigsworth, Don Sutherland and Natasha Tracz; the contributing school boards who gave their teachers time off to participate in the events; and the local businesses and organizations who made financial contributions. A special thank you to Thunder Bay Nordic Trails and specifically Kamview Nordic Centre, especially Peter Crooks and his gang.

Most importantly, I would like to recognize all the student athletes. Everyone's combined effort made this such an enjoyable event.

Once again, I would like to congratulate the city of Thunder Bay and OFSAA for all their hard work and

recent success. Hopefully, we'll see many more OFSAA championships in Thunder Bay in the years to come.

LIBERAL CAMPAIGN PROMISES

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Dalton McGuinty said he would not raise your taxes, and he proceeded to break that promise immediately upon having been elected. He was also elected on a promise of transparency and openness in government. That's where we got the \$6-million contract for the Liberal-friendly ad agency: an untendered, secret backroom deal to take a letter out of the OLGC lottery logo.

But today we find out that this government has now gone to the depths of not publishing the fact that the location of a caucus meeting would be moved, not publishing that in the Premier's agenda. Premier, caucus business is behind closed doors, but the time and location of that meeting is for the public and the media to know. Christina Blizzard, the president of the press gallery, said that in all her time in Queen's Park it is unprecedented that a government would move a caucus meeting without telling the press and giving them due notice of its time and location.

We find out that the Premier had election planning people coming to this caucus meeting. Were they the same experts who told him he could shut down the coal plants in 2007? If so, I'm suggesting you get some new advice. But I'm going to ask the Premier a question on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario: Dalton McGuinty, what are you trying to hide now?

1340

MARIJUANA GROW OPERATIONS

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): I want to address the issue of the huge grow-op on Jane Street in my riding. Unfortunately, I was not advised of the meeting that took place this past weekend, but let me say nonetheless that concrete action is needed to allay the concerns and fears surrounding the health risks associated with such operations. I believe that the best restitution we can make to all the occupants of this building is to give them the peace of mind that indeed those steps will be taken, and provide them with the assurance that living in this building will be safe and will not be a threat to their health.

I call on the mayor and the local councillor to have each unit of this building inspected by the fire, health and building departments and charge the owner with all associated expenses in conducting such inspections, and, further, to carry on as expeditiously as possible all the repairs and removal of mould and other chemical traces.

The local councillor believes that this building was targeted because the majority of its tenants cannot speak English. I would like to remind the local councillor that if this is the case, we have all over the area, all over the city, entire buildings where the majority of residents do not speak English. Therefore I would call on the councillor and the mayor to initiate inspections of all these

buildings, and maybe then we can assure all our tenants that living in their buildings is safe and provide them with peace of mind.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 107

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): Despite an all-party endorsement by the justice policy committee to hold hearings into the winter to accommodate the hundreds of groups waiting to be consulted with respect to Bill 107, and despite commitments by the Attorney General to do the same, it seems nothing will stop this McGuinty government from quashing debate on this fundamental piece of legislation.

The irony of not consulting with people on what is certainly among the most vital and essential pieces of legislation we have to protect the people seems to be entirely lost on this government. As Keith Norton, former chair of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, aptly put it, this decision is just "unconscionable."

This morning our leader, John Tory, joined with the member for Niagara Centre, Peter Kormos, and David Lepofsky, the disabilities act alliance's human rights representative on this bill, and Mr. Norton in a non-partisan press conference to make a final effort to convince Premier McGuinty and his Attorney General to honour their government's promise to extend public hearings.

"This should not be about politics," said Mr. Tory.

"There was no trickery; this was decided upon by all three parties," said Mr. Kormos in reference to extending the hearings.

"The government has not heard everything. More importantly, they have not listened," said Mr. Lepofsky.

"I implore the government to try to find a way to get this back on track," said Mr. Norton.

We have repeatedly asked the Attorney General to come forward with his plans to fund the linchpin of the overhaul, the legal support centre. He has repeatedly refused to answer my question. I'm simply confounded by this government's arrogant belief that it knows better—knows better than a former chief commissioner, knows better than the current chief commissioner and knows better than the champions of vulnerable people across all—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

FRENCH-LANGUAGE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

ÉDUCATION POSTSECONDAIRE DE LANGUE FRANÇAISE

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I'm pleased to express my gratitude to Premier McGuinty and Minister Bentley for last week's investment of \$29 million in francophone post-secondary education.

This investment will provide more high-quality French-language programs, increase post-secondary op-

portunities for francophones, provide additional opportunities for French-as-a-second-language students to pursue post-secondary education in French, and support financial aid for students studying in French.

L'Ontario est la province comptant la plus grande communauté francophone hors Québec, avec plus de 100 000 apprenants de langue française à tous les niveaux. En 2005-2006, 16 000 étudiants francophones se sont inscrits dans des établissements postsecondaires, dont plus de 12 000 dans les six universités bilingues et près de 4 000 dans les deux collèges de langue française.

I'm proud to tell this House that La Cité collégiale, in Ottawa, in receiving \$7.3 million in 2006-07 through a partnership with the federal government to expand the range of the French-language programs and services it provides.

The McGuinty government has also invested \$4.7 million in 2006-07 to enhance the quality of French-language programming at Ontario's bilingual universities; and \$15 million in 2006-07, rising to \$55 million by 2009-10, in new programs to increase access to post-secondary education for francophones, aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities and first-generation students.

De la part de tous mes commettants, je voudrais remercier le premier ministre ainsi que le ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités pour l'investissement dans l'avenir de la francophonie ici en Ontario.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): First, let me pass on greetings to the Egg Farmers of Ontario, who were kind enough to serve up a delicious breakfast this morning here at the Legislature. They, and all Ontario farmers, continue to play an integral role in this province, and it was wonderful to have the opportunity to dialogue with them today.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the new president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Geri Kamenz. Geri will bring a strong voice to the federation, ensuring that issues in agriculture receive due attention.

Geri has indicated that his approach will be on working with other farm organizations, consulting with farmers and being comprehensive in his search for solutions to agricultural issues. This is the right approach, and this government will be happy to continue with the OFA to address the concerns of the farming sector.

I myself look forward to working with Geri, as the last time I had the opportunity to see him at work was as a student in my classes at Viscount Alexander Public School in Cornwall in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh. As any educator will tell you, it is always a treat to see a former student succeed. I have the privilege of also standing here as a proud MPP, looking

at a former resident of my riding stepping forward to serve his province.

I want to wish Geri the best in his new role, and I am confident he will do extremely well. I would also like to pass on words of thanks to former OFA president Ron Bonnett for his tireless efforts on behalf of the agricultural community.

SAFE DRINKING WATER LEGISLATION

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I rise today to share details about a productive meeting in my riding yesterday addressing the Clean Water Act with special guest the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment.

The Clean Water Act is significant, groundbreaking legislation which evolved from recommendations made by Justice O'Connor in the Walkerton inquiry. Yesterday's round table involved environmentalists, conservation experts, municipal representatives, private sector members and key leaders from our agricultural community. It was an excellent opportunity to debunk many of the myths that surround the Clean Water Act.

The Clean Water Act is the first drinking water program of its kind in Ontario. If passed, it will make \$7 million available in 2007-08 for early actions to protect drinking water: \$5 million will support action to protect land and water surrounding water wells and municipal intakes; and \$2 million will support education and outreach related to source protection planning. The act requires consultation and collaboration with community partners to ensure safe drinking water.

The Clean Water Act is an example of the tremendous effort and importance our government places on working with local members of communities to achieve the best results for all Ontarians. The act will bring together the best minds in our community to protect our most valuable natural resource: our water.

I want to thank the parliamentary assistant.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 28, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1349 to 1354.

The Speaker: Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 240. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Gravelle, Michael	Peters, Steve
Balkissoon, Bas	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Kular, Kuldip	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Racco, Mario G.
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Ramal, Khalil
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Crozier, Bruce	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Watson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Oraziatti, David	Zimmer, David
Fonseca, Peter	Patten, Richard	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Barrett, Toby	Marchese, Rosario	Runciman, Robert W.
Bisson, Gilles	Martel, Shelley	Tabuns, Peter
Chudleigh, Ted	Miller, Norm	Tasca, Joseph N.
DiNovo, Cheri	Munro, Julia	Tory, John
Elliott, Christine	Murdoch, Bill	Yakubuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	
Horwath, Andrea	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 44; the nays are 22.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): I've just returned from a very successful mission to the Alberta oil sands to capitalize on opportunities for Ontario manufacturers.

What we said when we were there, quite frankly, was that Alberta is the fascination of the nation. The oil sands project has meant unprecedented economic growth in Alberta, creating a fierce demand for everything from skilled labour to industrial supplies. Alberta needs their companies' thousands of workers to construct these facilities and added manufacturing capacity from across Canada.

We think that's where we come in. Opportunities for growth are opening up in a big way, and we'd like to be a part of that. There are more than \$100 billion in long-term projects over the next 10 to 20 years, and I want to ensure that Ontario manufacturers play a major role in meeting Alberta's capacity demands to keep projects on

time and on budget. There was tremendous interest in this mission across Ontario and in fact, on short notice, 27 manufacturers joined me in Alberta.

I had excellent meetings with Alberta's economic development minister, Clint Dunford, and intergovernmental affairs minister Gary Mar. We talked about the Alberta oil sands project and how there are benefits for all of Canada, including Ontario manufacturers.

Ontario has tremendous manufacturing capacity. What we looked at was our interests that could actually help Alberta in the area of innovation, automation and outsourcing. More than one million Ontarians work in manufacturing here. Ontario manufacturers not only have the capacity but the skill and expertise to meet the needs of Alberta companies. The potential for partnerships is great for both Ontario and Alberta.

It's important that we establish new partnerships across the country and match Alberta companies with Ontario suppliers. That is what we started with on this mission. In fact, they named me the ambassador for the Leduc-Nisku Economic Development Authority.

For years, governments and countries geared their alliances on a north-south axis, but that's what economies dictated then. Now, opportunities for partnership exist within the borders of our own country between east and west. It's important that we find, as the minister there put it, a made-in-Canada solution. Our finance minister, Greg Sorbara, indicated in his recent fall economic statement that we should encourage interprovincial trade by matching the industrial needs in Alberta with the industrial capacity in Ontario. We should also explore the merits of joining the Alberta-British Columbia trade agreement.

This is not simply about Ontario's interests or Alberta's interests; it's part of the process of nation-building and what we as partners can do to help each other to grow and prosper. My colleague the Honourable Harinder Takhar, Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship in Ontario, worked as well to establish stronger partnerships between the regions across Canada when he visited Alberta and British Columbia about a month ago.

1400

In the meantime, we're working closely with the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters and the Canada and Alberta governments. We're encouraging Ontario manufacturers to participate in the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters National Buyer/Seller Forum in Edmonton next March. It's an excellent opportunity for Ontario suppliers and Alberta companies to be matched in future phases of the Alberta oil sands project.

At the same time we're supporting our manufacturing sector through the advanced manufacturing investment strategy, which in this first phase alone created \$187 million in investments and 600 jobs. New investments will be announced shortly as we continue to encourage companies to invest in leading-edge technologies and processes.

We recognize that we must be proactive if we want prosperity in every region of the province. The higher

Canadian dollar affects export sales. High energy costs have a significant impact on our small and medium-sized businesses. Global competition is fierce, and it will continue. Our government is investing in programs to help Ontario manufacturers and all sectors across the province succeed. Our broad strategy as a government is to build on our education and health care system, stable energy, and infrastructure. All of these efforts lay the groundwork for Ontario to attract new investment and expand its reach around the world.

Working together with our shared expertise, we can turn opportunities into realities like the Alberta oil sands project. Our government is hopeful that Ontario and its partners across Canada will prosper in this new and exciting era.

Alberta's boom has created a challenge for Alberta companies to keep up. Ontario is up to the challenge and willing to help.

As a government, we're doing everything we can to seize the moment. We know that if we nurture those partnerships between Alberta companies and Ontario suppliers, it's good for Alberta, it's great for Ontario and, in particular, it's great for Canada.

IMPAIRED DRIVERS

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I rise in the House today to speak to an important agreement that will help raise public awareness about the terrible consequences of impaired driving. The McGuinty government and Mothers Against Drunk Driving—MADD—have agreed to place roadside signs in memory of those who have lost their lives as a result of drunk drivers. MADD Canada will administer the memorial sign program and will work with the Ministry of Transportation to install the signs at safe locations along provincial highways.

These memorial signs will remind people of the high cost of impaired driving—the cost of someone's life. As Minister of Transportation I've worked closely with MADD Canada and other community groups such as the Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving and the Ontario Safety League. I have been repeatedly moved when I hear the testimonials of those who have lost loved ones due to impaired drivers.

The McGuinty government supports MADD Canada's efforts to stop drunk driving. Ontario has some of the toughest anti-drinking-and-driving laws in North America. We have stiff fines, licence suspensions, mandatory alcohol education or treatment, and an ignition interlock program.

While I'm proud that Ontario has the safest roads in North America, drinking and driving is still a factor in about one quarter of all fatal collisions in Ontario. Approximately 16,000 people are convicted of drinking and driving every year in Ontario. That's a rate of two an hour.

There is, however, some encouraging news. The number of fatal drinking and driving crashes is falling—

down 35% in the last 10 years. The latest statistics show that the number of fatalities involving an impaired driver in Ontario fell by more than 11% in 2004 compared to the year before.

We need to get the anti-drunk-driving message out in every way we can. Drunk drivers will simply not be tolerated on Ontario roads. That's why we have the toughest drunk-driving laws and that's why the McGuinty government is working with MADD Canada, community groups and law enforcement to raise public awareness.

These memorial signs will help us to do that. They will remind people to make the responsible choice. I know all honourable members will want to help us spread this message. The message is simple: Don't drink and drive.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Maybe the minister is sensing the reality faced by Ontario's manufacturing sector and that the 105,000 lost jobs represent more than just a "cycle," as she's been quoted as saying. Yes, it is true, Minister: It's more than just a cycle. Since the beginning of last year, Ontario has lost more than 105,000 manufacturing jobs. This is a dismal record for any government to have.

Considering the rate at which Ontario's manufacturers are losing competitive ground, this government's lack of a comprehensive job strategy is really what we need to highlight in this House. The manufacturing sector in Ontario is the second most taxed amongst its provincial counterparts. Ontario's tax on corporate capital trails only China worldwide.

What does this initiative do for northern Ontario, eastern Ontario? The forest sector is vanishing in northern Ontario, and communities such as Cornwall in the east have been devastated since the McGuinty Liberals came to power.

The auto sector in this province may be alive and well, but the auto parts suppliers in Ontario are suffering terribly. Canada's auto parts sector, which operates almost entirely in Ontario, has lost 10,000 jobs since the start of 2005.

It is not just large industries that are struggling. Big industries might be able to struggle their way through another hit from the McGuinty government; small and medium-sized businesses cannot.

Not long ago, the Premier was quoted as saying that over 1,000 jobs lost at GM in Oshawa were a "small contraction." What a dismal record for a Premier. The member from Markham at the time, talking about municipalities which were reeling from plant closures across this province and were asking the government to do something, referred to these municipalities as "cry-babies." What a dismal record for a government to have. The member for Guelph-Wellington, when announcing that 550 jobs were lost at Imperial Tobacco, talked about

how their plan was working. What a dismal record for a government to have. Some 105,000 manufacturing jobs gone in Ontario: what a dismal record.

Other sector job growth is some of the lowest in Canada: a dismal record for any government. Growth rates: a dismal record. Innuendo, half-truths, stories and broken promises: a dismal record. Lost jobs, "small contractions," "crybabies" and "Our plan is working": a dismal record. On October 4 of next year, Ontarians will judge you on your dismal record.

IMPAIRED DRIVERS

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I was very pleased to be able to join the minister yesterday at the signing of the memorandum of understanding. It's really a very exciting opportunity when you look at having an idea and then being able to see it come to fruition. The original resolution, of course, was passed unanimously by this House. It called for government to work with MADD Canada and the Ministry of Transportation.

Roadside memorials have two purposes. First of all, it is obviously an opportunity for the family to have a permanent memorial to recognize the needless loss of a loved one. But it's also an opportunity to provide a very important social message: "A real person died right here, needlessly, because of someone's irresponsible actions." All fatalities and injuries that are caused by drunk driving are needless, and we have a responsibility to find effective avenues for this important social message. Roadside memorials simply add to that arsenal of opportunities to get that message out.

Our government has a proud record, one that increased fines for drunk driving, that introduced suspensions for people who had less than 0.8%, and as well, the introduction and passage of Garfield Dunlop's private member's bill on ignition interlock. When you look at all of these things, it's certainly a very strong and determined message from this party on the extreme importance of getting out that message against drunk driving.

I'm very pleased that, through the minister, we were able to see this very important social message come out. I'm looking forward to the opportunities to actually see those roadside memorials on Ontario highways.

1410

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Finally, the government has figured out that there's an economic benefit to supporting the natural resources industry. Finally, this government has realized that if you were to do something to support the natural resources industry, it's not only businesses such as mining and forestry that could benefit but also southern Ontario, because they supply the services and means by which those particular industries are able to flourish. The unfortunate part is that the minister had to go to Alberta to figure that out.

I'm just saying, it's about time the government figured out that we have a very vibrant natural resources industry here in Ontario. We know that in northern Ontario there is the mining sector, if the minister hasn't figured it out, and there's also the forestry sector. If she, along with her government, were to do things to support the forestry sector so that we don't see the decimation of the northern economy that we're seeing today, southern Ontario and its manufacturing and service sectors would flourish.

I say to the government across the way, I guess the first step is admitting that you've got a problem, figuring out that maybe there's something you can do about it, and maybe then there is a hope, but it didn't take Alberta to figure that out. You should have figured that out in your own backyard. I say to the government that it's about time you figured that out.

We know that across northern Ontario, the forest resource industry is in deep trouble. We know that because of a number of issues this government fails to recognize by way of policy to resolve the problem. If you're sitting in Opasatika, in Hearst, Smooth Rock Falls, Kirkland Lake, Timmins, all the way across to Sault Ste. Marie, Bowater, Thunder Bay, Kenora, Ignace—and the list goes on—there are all kinds of forest-resource-based industries that have either shut their doors completely or have reduced their workforces significantly as a result of this government's policy.

Now there is still hope because the government, through this minister, has admitted a second thing today. I thought it was wonderful and refreshing to hear from the government that, finally, they've admitted the following: High energy costs have a significant impact on our small and medium-sized businesses. Well, hurray for the government. You finally figured out that electricity is related to the economic prosperity of Ontario. It is the first step towards admitting that you have a problem and finding a solution. I applaud the government for finally figuring it out.

We will work with you to develop a 12-step program to figure out that you're able to do something to respond to the crisis in both the manufacturing sector and the resource sectors. I applaud the Minister of Economic Development and Trade for finding the political fortitude to separate herself from her Premier and the Minister of Energy and to admit that—I want to repeat—high energy costs have a significant impact on our small and medium-sized businesses.

Madame Papatello, we want to say that we welcome this. You're finally becoming a champion for us on the benches on the opposite side and you will do something to move your Premier, your energy minister and others to our side towards finding the solutions that are necessary to put northern Ontarians back to work.

I say to you, Minister, I wish you well on the road of converting the rest of the Liberal caucus because, I can tell you, it is a very long road. Finally, after three years, we have one Liberal member who admits that their energy policies are costing jobs in Ontario. Bravo, Minister.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery the Right Honourable George Reid, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament. Please join me in welcoming our guest.

ORAL QUESTIONS

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. As the Premier will be aware, the Progressive Conservative caucus and I have been, for some time, calling on his government to provide detailed information about the justice system in order to ensure that Ontarians can get an accurate picture of exactly how well the system is functioning—or not. It's an idea this government has resisted, preferring instead to suggest that somehow this issue is somebody else's responsibility or that it's not important.

Now the federal government has acted, and proposed some new legislation last week. Media reports have supported our contention that the lack of evidence with respect to bail and other criminal matters as to what's going on, how many different things are happening, is a problem.

My question is this: Why has the Premier repeatedly refused our calls to provide more truth and transparency in the justice system by simply reporting more of the facts and figures as to what actually goes on in the courts to the public? Why would you refuse to do that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I want to refer the leader of the official opposition to the crown policy manual, which is available online. I know that one of his concerns is what's happening at bail hearings for those accused who are charged with a gun-related offence. I would encourage him to look at this crown policy manual. As I say, it's available online. It says, "At all stages of the prosecution, from bail to sentencing, the prosecution of firearms offences should be premised on providing the greatest protection to the community, not on considerations of expediency." So the very clear directive that has been set out to our crown attorneys is that when it comes to dealing with prosecution of firearms offences, they should not be dealt away with—to use the common parlance—but rather the greatest possible priority should be given to protecting the community at large. That is something that is in writing, something that has been issued to Ontario's crown attorneys.

Mr. Tory: That is very helpful, and I have been to the policy manual many times. In fact, each time you go back you keep hoping it gets better, but it doesn't. That wasn't the question, though. The question was the results that come out of the application, or not, of that policy.

We hear anecdotal statistics from time to time about bail. For example, since you raised that, Prime Minister

Harper said last week, quoting the Toronto police, that 40% of the 1,000 gun crimes committed in Toronto this year so far were committed by someone or were alleged to have been committed by someone who is under some kind of court order; 70% of the accused in Toronto's 62 murders this year were subject to earlier court orders; 14 of the 32 people facing murder or manslaughter charges in Toronto this year were on bail in connection with another charge at the time of the alleged offence.

What we're looking for, instead of this kind of anecdotal evidence that the Toronto police happen to have handy, is province-wide statistics, including on how many times bail is granted when the crown opposes it, for example.

My question is simple: Why would your government consistently and repeatedly oppose—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked. Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I want to provide the leader of the official opposition with more information and more specifics with respect to firearms prosecutions. Here is information I do not believe he has previously been aware of, because this is not available online, but it's part of the practice memorandum issued to counsel, criminal law division, in January of this year. It says:

"It bears repeating that the criminal misuse of firearms presents a serious challenge to a peaceful society. Given the potential for tragedy arising from such crimes, protection of the public must be crown counsel's paramount consideration, particularly as it relates to issues of bail. In all cases involving firearms-related offences, crown counsel shall, absent exceptional circumstances, seek a detention order."

So what we have in place today in Ontario is a very explicit directive to our crown attorneys to seek detention in the case of a bail application. And furthermore, now we've worked with Prime Minister Harper to ensure that we have in place a reverse onus provision. It seems to me that by any objective standard we're moving in the right direction.

Mr. Tory: I don't disagree that we're moving in the right direction. But I'm asking a different question, which is, with all those directives in place and all the rest of it, why can't we have tracking and reporting to the public of the data that reflect the results of the process you just spoke about? I'm asking you, if it's okay to put cameras in the courtroom, as your Attorney General says he is going to do, then why isn't it okay to keep track of the statistics as to what goes on inside that room? What we are asking for, and I'm asking the Premier again, is increased openness and transparency of the justice system. To begin tracking and reporting statistics on bail and on sureties and on sentencing deals, I think, will allow for real scrutiny and for the public to understand what's going on. Why won't you support making these facts available to the public by tracking them first and then by reporting them? It's a very simple question.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: If the leader of the official opposition has raised this specific request with Mr.

Justice McMurtry, I would be surprised if Mr. Justice McMurtry agreed with this request. He has faced this type of proposal in the past. He has been very clear in expressing his concerns about that. In the past, he challenged the former Tory government's decision to allow a private member's bill calling for the tracking of individual judges' sentencing records to proceed to the legislative process. He said this was perceived as a rather heavy-handed and irresponsible attempt to intimidate judges in the sentencing process.

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So I think what my honourable friend is asking, and he may not recognize this, leads us onto a slippery slope where we begin to actually count the number of times judges grant bail and do not, and we ask them to either subliminally or directly take into account the political considerations of the day. Mr. Justice McMurtry says that's the wrong way to go, and I agree.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 107

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. I asked only for aggregate statistics, not for judge-by-judge statistics, but in any event, my question for the Premier is this. It has been a week now since the Premier dropped the guillotine on Bill 107, breaking the promises of his Attorney General to hold extensive hearings on the legislation; in fact, as the Attorney General put it, to hold hearings for "how-ever long it takes."

Today, together with the member for Niagara Centre, Keith Norton, former chair of the Human Rights Commission, and David Lepofsky, the human rights representative for the disability act alliance, we had a news conference simply to indicate on behalf of the people whom the disability act alliance represents that there are hundreds of people who want, as promised and as advertised, to have their chance to have a say on this bill. We have proposed a timeline to the government; I have proposed it to you. You allow the people to be heard; we will have this matter expeditiously brought to a vote on March 19, or the next day, if you wish. Why won't you agree to consider that proposal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I don't know whether or not the leader of the official opposition has secured the agreement of the NDP to this particular proposal, but I'd be very surprised if he obtained their consent.

Our position has been very clear for quite some time now. We believe that there is something that seriously ails the human rights system in the province of Ontario. In fact, criticism has been levelled against this system, which we inherited, for many, many years now. Complaints take too long to be heard. Five to 10 years, in some cases, for resolution is simply unacceptable.

We believe there has been a healthy debate. We've heard from many people. Legislation has been under discussion now for over 200 days. We've heard from over 80 separate presenters. The Attorney General in his

own capacity through his office has also met with more than 40 groups over the past six months. We've heard from many Ontarians, we have received their advice, and we're acting on their advice, even more recently—well, tomorrow, in fact—with the introduction of still more amendments.

Mr. Tory: Well, "still more amendments" indicates in and of itself that the listening perhaps shouldn't be finished as yet. There's really no debate in the House on the need to fix the Human Rights Commission. The listening is so that we maybe can understand from other than those privileged enough to be here how to fix it.

Keith Norton, David Lepofsky, Barbara Hall, June Callwood, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, John Rae of the Alliance for Blind Canadians, Marianne Park, Barbara Anello, the Jewish Congress, Helen Henderson, the Toronto Star: These are some of the people who have said either that they want to be heard and/or that you are wrong to cut off this debate.

Keith Norton pointed out that this is legislation that is quasi-constitutional. That's how important and how fundamental it is in our system. So I would ask you: Why, when it is quasi-constitutional legislation, why, when we've said it could be brought to a vote the first week back here on a timetable that, frankly, you can determine, will you not let these people be heard in the meantime, listen to what they might have to say, and then proceed to pass what I'm sure would be better legislation? Why won't you agree?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: We are, in fact, listening. As the Attorney General indicated just a short time ago, the amendments that we plan to introduce tomorrow will reflect that.

We have been asked by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance, as well as the African Canadian Legal Clinic, as well as OPSEU, to make amendments to the appointment criteria of commissioners. They're right, and that's reflected in the amendments we're introducing tomorrow.

We were asked by the Human Rights Commission to mandate that the commission report annually to Ontarians. The commission is right, and that's reflected in the amendments we're introducing tomorrow.

We've been asked by the Canadian Hearing Society, Local Agencies Serving Immigrants and the Ottawa chapter of the Chinese Canadian National Council to provide for the ability to enter, examine records and compel testimony and enforce compliance. Those groups are all right, and that, again, is reflected in the amendments that we are introducing tomorrow.

We are listening to Ontarians, we are taking into account their good advice, and we're acting on that advice.

Mr. Tory: And the only problem that I'm pointing out to you is that there are a lot of other groups who, I think you would agree, are groups worthy of respect that may themselves have some more ideas that could make this bill even better, and you refuse to listen to them. Not only that; you make appointments to hear them, advertise

hearings that they can participate in and then shut that down in mid-process.

One of the bigger issues that we have going forward is whether or not people will be able to have access to the legal representation they will now need, as they don't under the current arrangement, to go in front of the tribunal. The member for Willowdale said on August 8, "the Attorney General has publicly committed ... to provide full legal support." The member for London North Centre said that the minister had said people will get the legal representation they need. The minister had given that assurance. We have no details. The only person asked to run it, legal aid, are themselves broke, and they've said they won't run it. There's been no budget amount set out, no real idea that anybody has.

I want to know if you, Mr. Premier, are prepared to tell the people of Ontario right here and now that people will have the full legal representation they're entitled to, that every single person will have access to a lawyer they need in front of this tribunal under your new regime.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, this is not a new issue that is being raised before me or certainly before the Attorney General and the committee that considered this. We have listened to and heard from countless numbers, either through the committee process itself or through the Attorney General's office in its usual workings.

The leader of the official opposition is very much focused on the process of this place. We are much more focused now, after devoting so much time and effort and energy to working as hard as we can to get the bill right, on the process that takes place and which traps so many people as they try to work their way through our Ontario human rights system. So the leader of the official opposition may continue to focus on this process; we're going to focus on the needs of people who need to avail themselves of Ontario's human rights system. There's been something troubling with that legislation for a long time. Those people out there can no longer wait, and we intend to move forward on their behalf.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is to the Premier. Premier, across Ontario people are worried about paying their hydro bills, keeping the lights on, polluted air, climate change and losing their jobs. This morning at the Toronto Board of Trade, I described how we could best address these challenges: by making energy efficiency the cornerstone of Ontario's energy future. I proposed some realistic and achievable solutions that would make a real difference—a real difference now—like strengthening the building code by immediately legislating EnerGuide 80 standards to cut energy waste and help people save money on their hydro bills.

Premier, can you tell us why the McGuinty government, in your fourth year of government, hasn't implemented these energy efficiency improvements already?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): I would remind the member opposite that Ontario is ranked right up with California as the best energy efficiency jurisdiction in North America. I remind him that the Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance just recently upgraded Ontario's performance to B+ from D, which it was before we took office. We acknowledge that there is more to be done. We're in the process of doing that. We set up a conservation bureau. We've added 54 appliances under the Energy Efficiency Act. There is more to do, and we're committed to doing it. I look forward to working with the member to ensure that we continue to lead the way not only in Canada but indeed in North America and around the world.

Mr. Hampton: The McGuinty government has a good public relations campaign on energy efficiency, but in fact not much is happening. A strong commitment to energy efficiency would keep hydro rates down, boost the economy, sustain good-paying manufacturing jobs and save Ontarians billions of dollars on their hydro bills. It is the key to a brighter energy, economic and environmental future for Ontario.

This morning, I also proposed a province-wide energy retrofit strategy that would provide low-interest loans to make homes, businesses and industries more energy-efficient. Energy retrofit strategies are a success story in Manitoba and Quebec and California. Can you tell us, when is the McGuinty government going to get in the game?

1430

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The member may have missed it, but we have already amended the building code to provide for among the most energy-efficient standards anywhere. We brought in the energy conservation act, which that member voted against; he voted against it. We've re-implemented a number of energy conservation programs, which that member cancelled when he was part of government. We have now gone province-wide with a number of programs that we piloted. There is more work to be done.

Had this work begun 10 or 12 years ago, we wouldn't be rushing to catch up. But we are catching up, and, according to independent analysts, including the Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance and the Suzuki Foundation, not only are we catching up but we're leading.

The member opposite talks about programs that are, in fact, worthy of consideration, as are a number of other ideas, and we will continue to look at those types of programs to ensure that Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: No strengthening of the building code until 2012, when environmental experts say it should have happened already, and no effective energy retrofit strategy: That is why this is a public relations campaign but not much is happening.

If we compare Ontario to California, that jurisdiction saved 4,000 megawatts from peak electricity use by improving the building code. They saved 2,000 more

megawatts from peak use by simply having tougher standards for appliances. In fact, they have held their electricity use per capita at a steady rate while it has increased by 20% elsewhere in the United States.

If you won't strengthen the building code, if you are not interested in an energy retrofit program, will you at least toughen up the standards for appliances and bring in Energy Star standards for all new appliances sold in the province today?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Let me set the record straight, because there were some factual inaccuracies in what the member just said. First of all, residential energy standards by the end of this year: Changes to the building code's energy efficiency standards will increase home energy efficiency over the current code by more than 21%. We will have the highest energy-efficiency standards in Canada, 13% higher than has ever existed in Ontario. Homes built in 2007 will be required to have higher insulation levels: Ceilings are being increased by 29%, walls by 12% and foundation walls by 50%. It goes on and on. This government has led the way on energy efficiency and energy conservation. Do you know what else he said in his speech this morning? He said we should keep the coal plants up north open and close the ones down south. He wants it both ways. He says on one hand—that member doesn't understand energy. He doesn't—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

FOOD BANKS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): The wordage from the Minister of Energy proves my case. This is a government that has lots to say about energy efficiency but energy usage is in fact going up. While other jurisdictions are implementing meaningful programs, Ontario under the McGuinty government just talks.

Premier, my question is: Why is Ontario's rate of food bank use the highest in Canada?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Let me just take the opportunity, first of all, to thank the Ontario Association of Food Banks for the good work they do and for the support they lend to their membership, which are food banks working on the ground. Let me thank all of those people who work and who volunteer at food banks throughout the province.

It's not all good news and I'm not going to pretend it is, but I think it is important to recognize when there is at least a little bit of good news. The number of Ontarians served by food banks declined by 2.4% this year over last year, but there are still close to 2.5% of Ontarians who access a food bank. That's 2.5% too many.

We will continue to keep working with our food banks, with our partners in the private sector, and of course we will assume greater leadership as a gov-

ernment on a go-forward basis when it comes to helping to address the issues which lead to Ontarians' having to avail themselves of a food bank.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, you constantly tell people that Ontario is a wealthy province, but the fact is that far more people are forced to use food banks in Ontario than in the three other large provinces—Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia—combined. Over 330,000 people are forced to use food banks in the province, and 17% of food bank users in Ontario work, but they don't make enough income; 40% are kids; and almost 20% are the disabled.

Premier, you tell people across Ontario that things are getting better. Why are so many poor Ontario children forced to use food banks under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I like to think that we're making some progress, and the fact that food bank usage is down this year by 2.4%, at a time when we're experiencing more modest economic growth, I think speaks well of some of the policies that we've put in place.

We're spending \$10.3 billion annually now for family and social services. That's 13 cents of every dollar. By way of comparison, we spend about 15 cents on the dollar for our schools. We've increased the minimum wage now three times. We have, through combined efforts, effectively given a single parent on social assistance with two children \$1,620 more every year. That's a 15.7% increase.

We've also made some changes to the Ontario Works and Ontario disability support programs that enable them, for example, to keep drug benefits while they transition back to work. So we are making some steps in the right direction, and we look forward to doing more.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, the usage of food banks has increased by almost 20% in Ontario over the last five years. Not only that; 25% of the food banks in Ontario reported in the last year that their ability to meet the needs of those they serve has declined in the last year. So you may say, "Oh, there are fewer people using food banks this year," but the food banks say that they can't meet the demand. They don't have the food there to address all of the people who have the need.

There's a really disturbing part with respect to kids. Your government claws back from the lowest-income children in this province \$250 million a year of federal money that is supposed to go to those kids to help their parents put food on the table and put clothing on their backs. It works out to \$1,500 per child per year. Premier, when will you end the clawback so that some of the kids might not be forced to use a food bank?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: My colleague from the NDP will know that we ended the clawback on a go-forward basis in 2004. He will also know, in keeping with the report which he is quoting from today, that the number of Ontarians served by a food bank has in fact declined this past year.

He'll also, I'm sure, want to make reference to the passage on page 17 of the same report, issued today. I

quote from that: "We have seen some changes, as our provincial government is beginning to respond to the issues that we have ignored for almost a generation. There are a growing number of vocal advocates within government, more detailed studies and reviews, and incremental changes to our income support systems."

The fact is that usage has come down, even though somewhat modestly. This acknowledges that we are moving in the right direction, and I acknowledge myself that there is more to be done.

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MUNICIPAL PROPERTY ASSESSMENT CORP.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I have a question to the Minister of Finance. On June 26 of this year, MPAC chair Debbie Zimmerman sent you a letter where MPAC is seeking a minimum of an 11% increase in their budget, or \$16 million, despite the fact that there is an assessment freeze until 2009. The minister knows, as part of that spending spree, that MPAC proposes hiring an additional 225 staff, taking place during an assessment freeze in the province of Ontario. Clearly, Minister, another sign of Dalton McGuinty waste—hiring more people to do less work. Please tell me and justify: How can Dalton McGuinty's Ontario continue to waste this kind of money? Surely you're going to step in and say no to the increase in budget and the hiring of 225 staff during this assessment freeze.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I appreciate the question from my friend from Erie–Lincoln. It gives me an opportunity to once again remind him and people who pay attention to the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. that that corporation is an arm's-length corporation, that it has an independent board, that its budget is set and approved by that board, and that the funds that pay for the work of MPAC come collectively from municipalities across Ontario.

Certainly it's in our collective interest to make sure that MPAC is run very, very efficiently. We take that into consideration as we make our appointees to the board and in our reviews of how the property assessment system is working. Obviously, efficiency is one of our number one priorities.

Mr. Hudak: Indeed, a very strange answer from the minister who has given directions to MPAC on a regular basis already. The chair is a former Liberal federal candidate; the vice-chair is your own parliamentary assistant. So, Minister, don't tell us about this arm's-length relationship.

You know full well that Mayor Bradley of Sarnia wrote to you indicating that, "Given the recent announcement of a property tax assessment freeze for the next two years and given the fact that Ontario municipalities will be paying \$300 million to operate MPAC in that time period, I am requesting a rebate to Ontario communities to compensate us for the fact we are receiving no services

of any significance from MPAC during the" assessment "freeze."

Mayor Bradley asked for a rebate; instead, Dalton McGuinty and Greg Sorbara are increasing the rates by some \$16 million, meaning that MPAC's costs will have skyrocketed by some \$29 million, or 20%, under your regime.

Tell me, Minister, that you're going to make a call and put a stop to this. How could you justify, during an assessment freeze, the hiring of 225 more staff—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I'll tell my friend where I'm going to start. What I'm going to try and stop is his attacks on people like the chair of the MPAC board, Debbie Zimmerman, former regional chair of the region from where my friend from Erie–Lincoln comes, a very well-known and very well-respected leader in that community and a great chair of the board. He also mentions Mike Bradley, also a former Liberal candidate, if my memory serves me well.

What we're going to concentrate on is making MPAC a much more efficient organization. We will do that by changes in regulation and ultimately, perhaps, legislation. That's why we put in place the two-year freeze on assessments and that's why we're undergoing a thorough review of how that organization works on behalf of the taxpayers of this province.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 107

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): A question to the Premier: Premier, today former Ontario human rights commissioner Keith Norton joined the chorus of outrage about your cancellation of public hearings into Bill 107. Government members of that committee voted unanimously to conduct hearings through to when the House rises on December 14 and then commence those hearings once again in January so that those people could be heard. You and your government promised those people an opportunity to participate in those hearings. Why are you breaking your promise to them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I know that the member opposite is going to want to recollect and put on the record the fact that he promised that he would do everything that he possibly could to prevent passage of this bill—to filibuster. I do not question his sincerity, his devotion, his commitment or his perseverance when it comes to preventing passage of this bill, but on behalf of the thousands and thousands of Ontarians who had to suffer under a terribly-less-than-adequate human rights system, we feel a sense of responsibility to move forward, and that is exactly what we will do.

Mr. Kormos: That, sir, is hooey, and you know it. You know full well that if you wanted to time-allocate third reading debate, you could have time-allocated third reading debate; you didn't have to slam the door in the faces of scores of people who you promised—your

promise—would have an opportunity to appear in front of that committee.

Keith Norton says you're wrong. Your current commissioner, Barbara Hall, says you're wrong. June Callwood, whose endorsement you relied upon when she was agreeing with you, says you're wrong. Why are you breaking a promise to people who relied upon your advertising, which indicated a December 15 cut-off date to sign up to make submissions? What are you talking about? You spent over \$100,000 of taxpayers' money on ads promising a December 15 cut-off date. Why are you breaking your promise to those people?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Sometimes it seems that the NDP caucus is the only place on the planet where heat travels faster than light. Sometimes it seems like that.

I always appreciate my colleague's passion. But I can say that we feel we have devoted a considerable amount of time, a reasonable amount of time and effort and energy, to listening to all of those who have something to offer, who have good advice, good counsel, solid recommendations. Earlier today I referenced the AODA, the African Legal Clinic and OPSEU. I have referenced the Human Rights Commission, I have referenced the Canadian Hearing Society, Local Agencies Serving Immigrants and the Ottawa chapter of the Chinese Canadian National Council. Also, we've heard from the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada and the Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office. All those people we have recently heard from once again, and their advice has now been incorporated into amendments to be tabled.

EDUCATION

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, my question is about learning to 18 and making sure kids stay in a learning program so they have the tools they need to build a better future and a career. If passed, this legislation will make Ontario students keep learning to 18 or graduation through creative incentives that realize their individual strengths and potential.

The McGuinty government is committed to increasing the graduation rate. We have seen an increase in the graduation rate from 68%, when we came into office, to 71% last year. That translates into 6,000 more people finishing high school and improving their future prospects. When you look at the reverse statistic, Ontario has a dropout rate of 29%; that's 10 to 20 points behind the rest of the country. That's not acceptable, and this government has moved to correct that situation. We have to demand that standard, that as a minimum our students in Ontario must achieve a high school diploma.

Minister, can you tell this House what we're doing to transform our high school students through Bill 52?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): Indeed it is not acceptable to have 30% of our students not graduating from high school, so we are expanding the program possibilities for our students so that more students will graduate. In fact, we're doing nothing less

than shifting the culture in our secondary schools. What we're doing is expanding co-op credits through increased partnerships so that students can graduate, counting up to two credits towards their diploma, two co-op mandatory credits. We're allowing students to bundle their courses into a high-skills major so that when they go out into the workplace, they have a certification that says they have acquired certain skills in their high school years. We're allowing students to earn credits towards a diploma through college and apprenticeship and university courses, so we're allowing students who might not otherwise go on to post-secondary to have a taste of what post-secondary might be like, and they will go on. In fact, the member for Peterborough will be happy to know that in his two English-speaking boards, Kawartha Pine Ridge and the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic board, this year students can benefit from a pilot in dual credit that has been developed with Sir Sandford Fleming, and it's a great step forward.

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Mr. Leal: Besides keeping kids in school and increasing their graduation success rate, I understand that the learning to 18 legislation is designed to assist in the transition from secondary school to post-secondary education. As a member who represents a riding with both an outstanding community college and a university, I know how important a post-secondary education is to a student's success. But in addition, every individual who goes on to complete a degree or diploma or the training needed to become an apprentice contributes to the economic success of our communities and the province. That's why it's crucial that we open new pathways to creating opportunities for students who might otherwise be discouraged to learn outside the traditional learning environments. By doing so, we inspire them to continue in their studies or encourage them to return if they have left school early.

Minister, how will the learning to 18 strategy connect with students with new and relevant learning experiences that build on their interests and strengths and help them not only to complete their high school but afterwards? How can we continue along this path to success for people learning to age 18?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): The member from Peterborough is absolutely right: 80% of the new jobs we create require some form of post-secondary education, whether it's college, university or enhanced skills training. What we're going to do is build on the foundation of what is already working. We need to be creative, but we need to maintain the integrity of the credit process. So, for example, we're going to build on the success of the Ontario youth apprenticeship program, which engages 21,000 students every single year and gives them a taste of an apprenticeship and a high school credit at the same time. We're going to build on the success of the pilot projects we have out right now in the school/college-to-

work initiative. In fact, 2,500 students this year are going to be engaged, through 100 pilot projects of 72 boards, in getting both a high school and a college credit. We're going to build on the strengths of what's working by working with our educational partners.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Premier. Premier, I know that both you and the Minister of Natural Resources agree that you've cured all that ails the forestry sector. In fact, your minister is on the record as saying that the forest sector in Ontario got off virtually scot-free as far as the impact of the US housing slump. I can tell you that I'm sure the industry doesn't see it that way.

Your minister said something else at the recent energy announcement in Thunder Bay that got my attention. He said that the government had now acted on all the recommendations of the Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness that he had appointed as the minister. Well, Premier, I would like to remind you about the first recommendation of that Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness: "The council recommends that the Ontario government establish an independent position of chief forester for Ontario, reporting to the Minister of Natural Resources." Premier, when did you appoint the chief forester?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm delighted to take the question. I know that the minister is on his way from BC, where he was attending a conference.

The member opposite will know that we have worked long and hard now with our forestry sector. He will also know that the challenges being experienced by Ontario's forestry sector are not dissimilar to those being experienced by forestry sectors in Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and BC—indeed in much of North America. He will also know what we've done in terms of specific substantive supports for forestry, whether we're talking about our \$150 million over three years through the forest sector prosperity fund to leverage new capital investments, the \$75 million annually which we have now uploaded for the construction and maintenance costs of primary and secondary forest access roads, the one-time refund for stumpage fees of \$70 million, or the \$350 million in loan guarantees. He will also know that the recent announcement we made only came after we sat down with forestry sector representatives and worked with them in a co-operative and collaborative way to give them exactly what they told us they needed at this point in time.

Mr. Miller: Yes, and the number one recommendation they made was to ask for the position of a chief forester. And there is no chief forester.

Last week, I received an e-mail from an operator in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, the day after you made your energy announcement in Thunder Bay, regarding another sawmill shutting down. He writes:

"Another one bites the dust for our supply chain. The Timmins mill equates to about 10% of our total sawdust volume.

"Are you (both) aware of the growing list of indefinite mill closures in the sawmill industry? If not, please let me know and I will gladly supply a list of indefinite closures that are affecting us."

Premier, do you really believe there's nothing more you can do to assist the forestry sector? What about many of the other recommendations—some 26—that were made by the Minister's Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I have a number of supportive quotes, as you might imagine, from folks in the forestry sector, but I'll just make reference to one. This is from Tembec:

"With limited resources available, they"—the government—"appear to have shot with a rifle....

"You need to judge the rebate proposal in conjunction with other initiatives that have been undertaken by the province on the energy file....

"You put all those things together and they will be very helpful....

"You stabilize that segment of the industry and you then create a situation where the sawmills have a more secure market in which to sell their chips."

I know that the member opposite does not pretend that anybody in this House could possibly wave a magic wand and absolutely guarantee that no mill would ever shut down, that no forestry sector worker would ever lose their job. But I can proudly say that we have worked with the forestry sector, we will continue to work with the forestry sector, and we will do our share as a government, in an unprecedented way, to help strengthen Ontario's forestry sector and forestry workers.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question is for the Premier. Premier, as I'm sure you know, the reality of transit funding in this province is that the majority of operating and capital costs are being carried by cash-strapped municipalities. The Toronto Star has called for the province to step in and fund the expansion costs for GO Transit. Will you take action, Mr. Premier? Will you eliminate this one aspect of provincial down-loading, go to the municipalities and tell them that the province is going to take back the cost of GO Transit expansion?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I thank the member for the question. We know that this is an important issue for the municipalities, and we are currently going through the process of extending the existing municipal GO Transit development charge bylaws to ensure that the municipalities can indeed continue to collect the development charges. We have put a

record investment in GO of \$850 million this year. We recognize that public transit—GO Transit—is an integral part of transportation strategies in this province, and we have made the commitment, for the first time in many years, towards that transit. So not only are we working with the municipalities to enable them to continue to use the development charges to deal with GO Transit, but we are making our own record investment in GO Transit, something that hasn't been done in this province for many years.

Mr. Tabuns: Well, the simple reality is that there are long waits for vehicles, and when buses and trains come, they're packed. People know the system is operating at or over capacity, and yet this government is not acting to help cash-strapped municipalities. It is not taking on its shoulders the burden of fully funding GO Transit. It continues to talk about something in the future.

Will the government, will this minister commit to returning to the funding formula in place before 1995: 50% of operating costs and 75% of capital costs for transit covered by the province? Will you do that?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I thank the member for the question. Undoubtedly, he has had a wee bit of a reality check, when in fact nothing has been invested in GO Transit for many years. In fact, some folks downloaded and then uploaded it. We've made a \$1.3-billion investment in GO Transit this year. That transit funding across the province has been record investment in transit.

There is no question we need to do more, but we also had to deal with the fact that nothing had been done for many, many years. So now we are back to reinvesting in public transportation as an integral part of a transportation strategy right across this province: \$5.4 billion in roads and bridges; \$1.3 billion in GO Transit, enabling municipalities to continue to deal with their development charges. We're moving forward where you stood still.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. David Oraziatti (Sault Ste. Marie): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. As many of my constituents and most Ontarians know, infrastructure plays a very important role in our economy, our health, our transportation and in maintaining our high quality of life. My constituents understand how important it is to have safe drinking water and well-maintained highways and bridges. They also understand very well that a lack of leadership, vision and overall neglect in these areas can have devastating effects in Ontario.

The former Conservative government closed 28 hospitals and the NDP closed 150 schools while in office, and both previous governments had no plan to replace our decaying infrastructure.

1500

Minister, I want to commend you for your leadership in this area and ask you to elaborate on the investments the McGuinty government is making to ensure that we improve our infrastructure for all Ontarians.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I want to thank the member from Sault Ste. Marie for the question, because he is indeed correct: When we came into office in October 2003, we quickly realized that a plan was needed for critical infrastructure in this province. So we worked really hard with our stakeholders, our partners and our government ministries to develop an infrastructure investment plan that would keep Ontario competitive and maintain our high standard of living.

We developed ReNew Ontario, a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure investment plan that acknowledges the importance of looking to the future. We're moving forward with over 100 health care projects right across this province to modernize, expand and upgrade health care facilities. As of August 2006, over 3,000 school projects are under way to repair our deteriorating schools. We're making massive investments in transit: \$1.4 billion over five years to municipal transit initiatives, and an additional \$838 million for transit in major cities in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister.

The member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Oraziatti: It's obvious the opposition members know they've been missing in action on this file, but I'm pleased to hear more about the infrastructure investments that are being made in transit, highways, health and schools.

Residents in Sault Ste. Marie have benefited a great deal from our government's commitment to reinvest, including 90% capital funding for our new hospital, more than \$18 million for school improvements, \$15 million for the Borealis tourism development and over \$5 million for a border infrastructure link.

Minister, I also know that many communities do not have transit and do not receive gas tax funding, yet they also require infrastructure investments for roads and bridges and to ensure they have safe, clean drinking water. What can you tell us about our plan to address the infrastructure deficits that exist in small, rural communities, which can't afford but which need new, large infrastructure investments?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I couldn't agree more with the member from Sault Ste. Marie that Tories and New Democrats abandoned small-town and rural Ontario. They downloaded onto them. That's why our government has a program specifically designed to help smaller communities deal with their infrastructure investment needs.

In 2005-06 alone, to help with water and waste water projects, we invested approximately \$260 million in municipal systems. In 2006-07, a further \$127 million is planned. We've leveraged over \$1.3 billion through OSIFA financing for 130 municipalities. But along with water and waste water, my colleague the Minister of Northern Development and Mines often reminds me of the northern Ontario highway strategy, which ensures that we have safe and accessible northern communities—half a billion dollars earmarked for northern infra-

structure alone. Through COMRIF, smaller municipalities are receiving \$900 million in—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick all give or are poised to give their patients access to PET scans. In Ontario, only a few hundred patients have access to PET scans—that is, if they meet the restrictive criteria for clinical trials which have been going on for almost five years. In London, because doctors cannot find enough people to meet these restrictive criteria for trials, they are filling the PET slots with lab animals.

I say to you today, Minister: When will you finally provide Ontarians with the time frame for completion of these clinical trials and a date when they can expect access to their PET scans?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It's interesting that the honourable member, who in her tenure as Minister of Health was prepared to leave the people of Barrie waiting one year for an MRI, would now stand and talk about the next generation of diagnostics. It must be the reality that we've placed 78% more access to MRIs in our province that allows the honourable member to pass over what she didn't do and get on to the adoption of new technologies.

We believe that PET scans do offer an opportunity to enhance care in very specific circumstances and we're working along trials that have been adopted and adapted from other communities, including Australia and places in the United States, to ensure that PET scans are used in a fashion that offers the best clinical opportunity, considering, of course, that at \$2,500 per scan, unlimited access would be very, very impossible to meet. We'll continue to work and receive advice from clinicians who will guide us in the appropriate approach for the adoption of further access to PET scans in the context of our cancer services.

Mrs. Witmer: This minister continues to twist the facts. Our record is a proud one on MRI scans; we expanded it to all corners of the province. But I say to you, you continue to make excuses. These machines—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade will consider herself warned for the last time.

Member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mrs. Witmer: This minister has now diddled and allowed for almost five years of clinical trials on PET scans without allowing patients in this province access. Meanwhile, people go to the United States, they go to private clinics, they pay if they can afford it. The ministry sends people to the United States. Last year, your ministry paid over \$600,000. I have an e-mail here from Janet Franks of Barrie—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I need to be able to hear the member for Kitchener–Waterloo. That means that we must be quiet when she asks her question. So the next government member that I hear will be gone. Member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mrs. Witmer: Our PET machines are sitting idle while patients are forced to travel to the United States and to private clinics. Either they pay out of their pocket or, in many instances, the Ministry of Health is now paying the United States for PET scans. In fact, last year they paid over \$600,000 so that people could travel to the US, while we have machines sitting idle.

I have an e-mail here from Janet Franks of Barrie, whose oncologist requested a PET scan so it could eliminate the need for a difficult bone biopsy or provide an early diagnosis of cancer before it spreads. She has applied to the clinical trials, but guess what? She's been turned down so far because she doesn't fit the restrictive criteria. She writes to you: "I will not be waiting for the Ontario government to catch up with the rest of Canada's health care. The government encourages us to live a healthy lifestyle and promotes early detection but fails to keep its commitment."

What do you say to Mrs. Franks and others who desperately need a PET scan?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Firstly, what I say to Mrs. Franks and others, particularly reflecting the fact that the honourable member mentions someone who comes from Barrie, Ontario, is that you continue to stand in your place. That honourable member talks about diddling for five years when, for two of those years, she was the responsible party. That honourable member helped to develop the criteria that she now stands here and criticizes.

The reality for people in Ontario is that through the actions of our government, access to diagnostic services has been enhanced dramatically. She might have gone to a few announcements, she might have even gone to a ribbon-cutting or two, but the circumstances that she left behind were that MRIs were locked down tight after eight hours of service a day. Now people across the province of Ontario, through a 78% increase in access to diagnostic services like MRI, are enjoying access to a service that answers their questions. We will adopt appropriate utilization for PET scan, on the basis of the advice that is on offer to us from the very clinicians that you—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

MUNICIPAL AIRPORT FUNDING

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): My question is to the Premier. Premier, you'll know that many municipalities across Ontario are having great difficulty to fund the costs of operating their local airports. Since 1998, you will know that things have gotten a lot worse since the province decided to eliminate much of the funding that was used to support those local airports. Communities like Moosonee, Kapuskasing,

Earlton, Wawa, Chapleau and many other communities across the north and south are struggling to keep their airports open. For many of these communities, airports are vital to their economic success.

1510

Premier, the communities of Chapleau, Manitouwadge and White River have formed a task force asking your government for financial help to keep those airports open. Are you prepared to help them financially to make sure that those airports stay open?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I thank the member for the question. Currently, this government does operate 29 remote airports; we do supply the services for 29 remote airports in northern Ontario. We do not supply the services for the municipal airports, and that is currently not within our budget. I will be meeting with the municipalities in the next while and we'll be looking at what the options are, but currently there is no provincial funding to assist those small airports.

Mr. Bisson: That comes as a lot of bad news because, first of all, we recognize that the province of Ontario plays a key role to maintain 29 airports across ridings like Howard Hampton's and mine in those remote communities, and we accept that, but many other communities that I've listed, Kapuskasing to Wawa to Manitouwadge, across the north and the south are having great difficulty to keep those airports open. If they're not able to keep them open, it means economic activity in those communities can come to a halt. How do you attract investment in those communities if business people are not able to get to the communities to transact what is necessary to make a local economy work?

You have to find it within your means. It's something that the province used to do in the past, and it's something that you can turn around. I ask you again, are you prepared to reverse what you've just told me now and help those communities to keep those airports open?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: The funding was actually terminated in 1997-98 for the small airports, and currently it is not within our budget provisions to support these small airports. We support 29 remote airports, which we fund 100%, which is different than any other province in this country. We undertake to do the 29 and fund them 100%. We are not in a position at this time to support the municipal airports.

INTERPRETER SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Minister, last week you announced the investment of \$2.1 million in language interpreter services for women who are victims of domestic violence. Can you explain how this service for newcomer women works and who is

eligible? For instance, is the service available to women in Peel region who face language barriers in dealing with domestic violence?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): This is a very important service that the member from Mississauga East has pointed out, because throughout this province there are many women who don't have English as a first language and who are the innocent victims of domestic violence. Because of their language barriers, they are not able to get the services they need, whether they be legal, social or health services.

This language interpreter service that my ministry does in conjunction with the Attorney General and the Women's Directorate offers 24-hour service, seven days a week, for any woman who is a victim of domestic violence. It's available free of charge right across the province, 24/7, by expert, trained language interpreters. It is available in every community very quickly.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary? The member for Thornhill.

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): Thank you, Minister. It's great to see that you're making investments for newcomers whose first language is not English—I certainly know that and appreciate it—and who need assistance to navigate through our system.

Minister, can you please tell us more about language services for women who are victims of domestic violence? I also know of one employment pilot project that was announced last week. Could you please share with us more details about the program and how it will assist abused women in the town of Markham, in the city of Vaughan and in the region of York?

Hon. Mr. Colle: Again, the fastest growth of newcomer settlement is actually no longer happening in the city of Toronto. It is happening now in York region and Peel region. So non-profit agencies right across Ontario are linked to the language interpreter services.

I was so impressed last week when I went to the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, where they demonstrated the dedication the staff have in helping women in this very critical time of trauma.

Just to remind all of the members here, if you could please let your communities know that this service is available from Kenora to Cornwall at no charge. It's confidential, by expert service providers in all our communities. Please avail them of that service.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Energy, considering the minister's testimony to the standing committee on estimates. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Simcoe North has given notice of his dissatisfaction with

the answer to his question given by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services concerning written questions on the order paper. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

PETITIONS

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario from the people in Nepean–Carleton.

“Whereas Longfields and Davidson Heights in south Nepean are some of the fastest-growing communities in Ottawa and Ontario; and

“Whereas the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board has voted to authorize the final design phases for a grade 7 to 12 school to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has lifted a three-year moratorium on school closings in order to make way for new educational facilities;

“We, residents of Nepean–Carleton, petition the Parliament of Ontario to ensure that the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board continues with plans to build a new grade 7 to 12 school no later than autumn of 2008 to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities.”

I support this petition wholeheartedly. I affix my signature and present it to page Mariam.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I have here a petition from the Canadian Federation of University Women from Northumberland, Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

“Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

“Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

“We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement.”

I am in agreement and would send this down with page Simon.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): I have a petition from the Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services group in Mississauga on preserving cross-border travel. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the United States government, through the western hemisphere travel initiative, is proposing that US citizens will require a passport or single-purpose travel card to cross the Canada-US border; and

“Whereas a passport or single-purpose travel card would be an added expense, and the inconvenience of having to apply for and carry a new document would be a barrier for many Canadian and US cross-border travellers; and

“Whereas the George Bush government proposal could mean the loss of as many as 3.5 million US visitors to Ontario, and place in peril as many as 7,000 jobs in the Ontario tourism industry by 2008, many of which are valuable entry jobs for youth and new Canadians; and

“Whereas many of the US states bordering Canada have expressed similar concerns regarding the punitive economic impact of this plan, and both states and provinces along the US-Canada border recognize that the importance of the safe and efficient movement of people across that border is vital to the economies of both countries;

“Be it therefore resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the establishment of a bi-national group to establish an alternative to the proposed US border requirements, and inform Prime Minister Harper that his decision not to advocate on behalf of Ontarians is ill-advised and contrary to the responsibilities of elected representatives in Canada.”

I support this and will sign my name to it.

1520

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the proposed Long-Term Care Homes Act is extremely lengthy and complex and requires full and extensive parliamentary and public debate and committee hearings throughout the province; and

“Whereas the rigid ... and detailed framework proposed is excessive and will stifle innovation and flexibility in the long-term-care sector; and

“Whereas the additional burden, red tape and punitive measures imposed by the proposed legislation will aggravate and exacerbate the chronic underfunding of the sector to the detriment of residents of the homes; and

“Whereas the proposed legislation will have serious implications for the viability of the for-profit, and not-for-profit, charitable and municipal long-term-care sectors;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We demand that the McGuinty government withdraw the proposed act, or remove the offending sections, and fulfill its commitment by a substantial increase in funding on a multi-year basis in the order of the promised \$6,000 per resident, per year."

I've also signed this.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I have another petition, this time from the Canadian Federation of University Women, Barrie and district. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

I would send this down with page Philip and would sign it in agreement.

COMMUNITY MEDIATION

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): Thanks to the clients of Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services in Mississauga for this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly with regard to support for community mediation.

"Whereas many types of civil disputes may be resolved through community mediation delivered by trained mediators, who are volunteers who work with the parties in the dispute; and

"Whereas Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services established the Peel Community Mediation Service in 1999 with support from the government of Ontario through the Trillium Foundation, the Rotary Club of Mississauga West and the United Way of Peel, and has proven the viability and success of community mediation; and

"Whereas the city of Mississauga and the town of Caledon have endorsed the Peel Community Mediation Service, and law enforcement bodies refer many cases to the Peel Community Mediation Service as an alternative to a court dispute; and

"Whereas court facilities and court time are both scarce and expensive, the cost of community mediation is very small and the extra expense incurred for lack of community mediation in Peel region would be much

greater than the small annual cost of funding community mediation;

"Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, support and fund the ongoing service delivery of the Peel Community Mediation Service through Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services."

I'll send this with Sarah.

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I've received more petitions from the people of Port Sydney to do with the Mary Lake dam. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway, where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

I'd like to thank the participants in the program for internationally trained veterinarians in Guelph, supported by—

The Speaker: Thank you. You've read the petition.

LAND TITLES

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas, in the current environment of an escalating problem of title theft and mortgage fraud, property protections for homeowners are warranted and real measures are necessary to address real estate fraud; and

"Whereas MPP Joe Tascona's Restore the Deed Act, Bill 136, has passed second reading in the Legislature and has been referred to the standing committee on general government; and

"Whereas, among others, the Restore the Deed Act has four primary benefits:

"—Reduce the harm by ensuring that the person who is the rightful owner of the property keeps the property. The innocent buyer or the innocent lender must seek compensation from the land titles assurance fund, as is New Brunswick law;

"—Prevent the fraud by restricting access to registration of documents to licensed real estate professionals who carry liability insurance, by requiring notification statements and the freezing of the registration, as is Saskatchewan law, and by establishing a system of 'no dealings' where landowners can mark their title, which can only be removed by them using a personal identification number prior to the property being transferred or mortgaged;

"—Access to the land titles assurance fund be reformed as a 'fund of first resort' and be operated by an arm's-length board of directors appointed by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, composed of a broad representation of consumer, real estate industry and law enforcement groups;

"—Victims of fraud prior to the enactment of the Restore the Deed Act will be eligible to apply for compensation under the reformed land titles assurance fund; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's proposed legislation will not get the job done;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to enact the measures to protect homeowners from having their homes stolen, as contained in MPP Joe Tascona's Restore the Deed Act."

I support the petition and sign it.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I have a petition from the Canadian Federation of University of Women which reads:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has" to date "failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

I'll share that with Daniel. It's been signed.

1530

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have petition signed by a great many people in Ontario. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the proposed Long-Term Care Homes Act is extremely lengthy and complex and requires full and extensive parliamentary and public debate and committee hearings throughout the province; and

"Whereas the rigid, pervasive and detailed framework proposed is excessive and will stifle innovation and flexibility in the long-term-care sector; and

"Whereas the additional burden, red tape and punitive measures imposed by the proposed legislation will aggravate and exacerbate the chronic underfunding of the sector, to the detriment of residents of the homes; and

"Whereas the proposed legislation will have serious implications for the viability of the for-profit and not-for-profit, charitable and municipal long-term-care sectors;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We demand that the McGuinty government withdraw the proposed act, or remove the offending sections, and fulfill its commitment by a substantial increase in funding on a multi-year basis in the order of the promised \$6,000 per resident, per year."

I affix my signature as I agree with the petition.

NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM FUNDING

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources plays a vital role in the protection and management of the natural resources that belong to all Ontarians; and

"Whereas MNR's budget for 2006-07 is 24% less, in real terms, than it was in 1992-93; and

"Whereas vital programs relating to fish and wildlife, provincial parks, forestry, and other MNR activities continue to be cut back; and

"Whereas the aesthetic, economic, educational, environmental, recreational, and social value of our national resources far exceeds the cost of protecting and managing them;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That funding of the Ministry of Natural Resources be increased to a level that will enable it to stop cutting existing programs and provide full funding to all existing programs as well as any new programs that may be required to ensure the effective protection and management of Ontario's natural resources."

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I want to bring members' attention to the west members' gallery, where we have a former member visiting us: Wayne Wettlaufer from Kitchener Centre in the 37th Parliament.

OPPOSITION DAY

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I move that, in the opinion of this House, an alarming number of murders and other violent crimes are alleged to be committed by people who were out on bail for crimes previously alleged to be committed;

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should adopt a policy to direct crown attorneys to oppose the making of all orders for bail for violent crimes;

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should seek a review of all orders granting bail for charges involving violent crimes;

That, in the opinion of this House, the issue of crimes alleged to be committed by people already out on bail is of increasing concern to the people of Ontario;

That, in the opinion of this House, the lack of statistics relating to bail orders and court proceedings prevents the public from obtaining an accurate picture of the functioning of the justice system; and

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should begin providing more detailed information about the justice system in order to ensure Ontarians have an accurate picture of whether the justice system is functioning well and in the best interests of public safety.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Tory has moved opposition day number 4. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to—
Applause.

Mr. Tory: You know there's trouble afoot when members of the McGuinty Liberal government applaud you when you stand up. I should check my chair to see if it's booby-trapped.

I would like to direct most of my comments today to the question of the keeping of statistics and the shedding of some light on the workings of our justice system. I've spoken quite a few times before in this House on the issue of the directions given to crown attorneys with respect to opposing bail applications by those who are charged with crimes involving violence or guns and with respect to the crown equally consistently asking for a review of bail orders that are granted to people like that.

I understand the fact that those bail orders are made by judges. I think what we want the people doing who are representing us in court, representing the people of Ontario, is to take a consistent position. The Premier today read me some of the provisions from the crown policy manual, which is giving direction to the crown attorneys as to what they should do. Some of that wording is moving in the right direction, but I think it is not yet firm enough in saying that in all instances where people are charged with crimes involving guns and in all instances where people in that circumstance are in fact given bail, those applications should be opposed, and when they're given bail, it should be reviewed, or at least the crown should ask for a review, so that we can send the message on behalf of the public and on behalf of the people of Ontario. In fact, I would say that if that crown manual means anything on behalf of the government's policy intent in putting that into the manual, that's what we want them to do, that there are going to be—maybe not "no ifs, ands or buts," but very few ifs, ands or buts in an extraordinary case. That's not what we're seeing, especially when you review some of the statistics I went over, in question period today, where you have a huge number of those charged with the murders that have taken place thus far this year in Toronto, people who were the subject of previous court orders or who were already out on bail when they were charged with the subsequent offence.

There's a serious problem here, and to me the problem isn't about those people—that's a problem; the problem isn't about their victims entirely—that's a terrible problem and a terrible tragedy for those families; the problem is about confidence in the justice system. There is nothing more important in our society than—I've talked in here before about respect for the rule of law. This is tied up in the same thing. If you have disrespect for the place in which the laws are made—which can happen

when we behave in a manner here, for example, that's uncivilized—if you have disrespect for the laws that are passed by this place, regardless of the behaviour that goes on when they're being passed, or if you have a justice system that is perceived by people to be operating in a manner that is completely inconsistent with their understanding of what should be done and how matters should be dealt with—recognizing that people aren't lawyers, but they certainly do have a great degree of inherent common sense about how things should be dealt with, and that does not include people who are charged with very serious crimes walking the streets hours later, then found to be charged with another serious crime, and then found after that in many cases to be violating the conditions of their bail with seemingly no consequences.

When we have the Attorney General himself calling for tougher bail rules—and I will concede that although they did it well after us—months, almost years after we did—the Premier and the minister have recently been on-side in terms of calling for tougher bail conditions. We seem to be making some progress, thanks to the efforts and the initiative of the government of Canada, but with the support of Mr. McGuinty, Mr. Bryant and us—we were there from the beginning. So there is some progress being made. But Mr. Bryant correctly says that confidence in the justice system plummets when someone accused of a gun crime is back out on the streets the next day. If there is no confidence in the justice system, then there is no confidence in our laws, there is no confidence in the people who make the laws, and I think that is generally bad for the system we believe in so strongly.

We have Chief Faulkner in London saying, "We have seen this in other cases where individuals have multiple (instances) of failing to comply with conditions and they are still released back into the public." He said that this was even a bigger issue than one of the particular criminal incidents that took place in his city.

We saw a huge murder bust that took place this year, where a whole bunch of people were arrested. The story in the *Toronto Star* on August 8, 2006, starts out by saying that of the 32 people charged, 21 were already under some kind of a court order before they were charged with this subsequent offence. I understand that they're innocent until proven guilty of the subsequent offence. But the fact is, they were charged with a subsequent offence when they were already the subject of a prior court order: 11 on bail, nine already banned from having a firearm, eight on probation.

When this kind of thing happens, I would argue that it dramatically undermines confidence in the justice system. We have the deputy police chief of Toronto, Tony Warr, saying that the number of people who repeatedly disrespect the law but get bail concerns him.

"One was on three separate firearms prohibition orders, another was on two separate orders," he said, looking at the statistics.

"They've already proven ... they don't respect the court by disrespecting their order not to possess firearms and being caught again with firearms. I think once a per-

son puts themselves in this position, the court shouldn't have any hesitation of keeping them in custody."

I agree with Deputy Police Chief Tony Warr. He's right about that. That's what the public thinks about this too.

What are we asking for here? We are asking for statistics to be kept and reported to the public on the number of individuals granted or denied bail. The Premier frankly tried to take this off in the direction of a red herring this afternoon when he said that what I and the Progressive Conservative Party were looking for through this motion was some kind of individual tracking system for individual judges. Not at all. I'd just like to see the aggregate numbers across the province of Ontario in all courts on the number of people granted bail and the number of people denied bail. I find it very interesting that we have no trouble keeping track and reporting, as we do every year, on the number of hours the courts operate, but we can't keep track and don't keep track of the number of instances in which bail is granted or in which bail is denied.

1540

The second thing we're asking for: How about the number of people who are alleged to have committed additional crimes while out on bail? I would think that would be a good figure to know in the context of whether or not the bail system is operating properly and whether or not there really is a gross disrespect being shown, at the very least by people who are out on bail.

They tell us at the Ministry of the Attorney General that they don't keep track of that. The government says they won't keep track of that and they don't want to keep track of that, and yet we get a quarterly report each year from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs on the number of pigs that are on farms across Ontario. So we think that's an important piece of information to keep track of and report to the public, but the number of people who are alleged to have committed additional crimes while out on bail is not important.

The Ministry of the Attorney General tells us they do not keep track, and the Premier tells us he will not keep track, of the number of sureties actually collected when people violate bail. When their relatives or their friends put up the money and say they will behave themselves and show up for court, how much of that money do we actually collect when people violate their bail conditions? We don't know. They don't keep track, they won't keep track and they won't tell us, yet, they can tell us the number of calls to the "bear wise" hotline and, out of that total number of calls, the number of people who spoke to a live operator. This is information deemed vital to the public interest in the province of Ontario, and yet when our party asks, "Could we possibly keep track of the number of sureties that are actually collected on?" that information is deemed too dangerous or too hard to collect or I don't know what. We never really get an excuse other than, "We just don't do it." And it goes on.

The last thing, but not least, we talk about in this motion is: Could we have statistics and figures on the

number of people who get these sentencing deals? I'll call them, somewhat provocatively, sweetheart sentencing deals, because some of them are. We want to know how many people get the double- and triple-time credit for the time served in custody before their sentencing. We are told that they don't track that information. They don't keep track of it, they can't keep track of it, they won't keep track of it, they're not interested, and yet we can get a report any time we want on how many eggs are laid by poultry on farms across Ontario annually. I'm sure that's a very good piece of information to know. It's important to the good people who came and fed us breakfast here in the Legislature this morning. But why is that deemed okay to report on—to collect and to make public—and the information we're asking for, in the interests of developing confidence in the justice system, is not?

I'll conclude my brief remarks so that other colleagues on all sides of the House can speak. I'll quote the Attorney General again. He said on August 24, 2006, in explaining his decision to allow cameras in certain very limited instances to be brought into the courts, "I think that our justice system is ready for its close-up." Well, I agree with him. Not only is the court system ready for a close-up, I would argue the court system needs a close-up, and it needs a close-up so that people will know what's going on, so that they can keep an eye on it. At the end of the day, these courts are the custodians of the laws we pass in this place, the laws we pass on behalf of the people. They are the custodians of the right to enforce those laws, hand out sentences and approve or not approve deals that are made.

I want to just address this one last point. It seems interesting that the Attorney General says it's okay to have some cameras in a few courts, but it's not okay to keep track of the facts of what goes on in there. I suppose that if the cameras were in there, we could sit and watch TV and add it all up, but why should we have to do that? They're adding up the eggs, they're adding up the bears, they're adding up the phone calls to the bear hotline, they're adding up the pigs and they're adding up all of these other things. There are thousands of people around government buildings adding stuff up and putting out reports they deem in the public interest, but somehow this information is not in the public interest.

I think it is high time we got on top of this and we said that we're going to open the justice system up, we're going to let some light in on this so that people can see what is going on. I think what it will do is increase confidence in the justice system. It will increase confidence. It's not going to interfere with anybody's right to make decisions.

The last point I want to make is that somehow today the Premier talked about how this was going to put a chill on judges. Let's just mention the fact that the number of people alleged to have committed a crime out on bail is a fact that is not about what judges do; it's about what people do who are out on bail. It has nothing to do with judges. The number of sureties actually collected when

people violate their bail: That has nothing to do with judges; it only has to do with what people do when they're on bail and whether we collect the amount those people put up. The number of double- or triple-time sentencing deals agreed to by the crowns: That has nothing to do with judges. I'm not after whether the judge approves the deal; I'm after whether our crown attorneys make it in the first place, and whether they should be.

The notion that the government trumps up, this whole routine that this is somehow about some chill we want to put on judges, is just hogwash. It's about confidence in the justice system. It's about openness. It's about transparency. It's time we had it. If we can have the cameras, then we can have the facts on the table. If we can collect information about bears, then we can collect information about bail. Let's get on with it. Let's do something sensible. I hope some of the members opposite recognize that this is what their constituents want us to do to make sure we can have confidence in information about the justice system.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): It's my pleasure to add, this afternoon, comments on the official opposition's motion today. It will give us an opportunity to compare and contrast with respect to our government's position on public safety and security in Ontario, because no one has a monopoly on this issue in this province. While I think that the objective is based on a premise that is committed to ensuring that Ontarians have a safe province to live in, there are a few other things that I think we should be looking at. I want to speak for a few moments about some of those things that our government has done to address this issue and make some comments on the opposition's motion today.

It's fairly straightforward in terms of looking at the lobbying effort through our Premier's efforts with respect to changing the bail system in Canada. So let's look for a moment at advocating for the reverse onus on those accused of crimes committed with a gun.

During the last federal election, the Premier wrote to the leaders of all federal parties demanding that they take action on this important public safety issue. Last week, that leadership paid off. He stood shoulder to shoulder, across jurisdictional and party lines, with Prime Minister Harper and Mayor Miller to support the reverse onus for bail when an accused is charged with a gun crime offence. I would submit that this is tremendous progress on an issue that has been plaguing not only this city but communities across Ontario where individuals are released on bail when they have committed an offence with a firearm.

We believe that when an individual uses a gun and commits a criminal offence, it should be up to the accused to convince a judge why they deserve freedom, not up to the crown to prove why they should be detained. The McGuinty government has also advocated for federal changes to strengthen bail rules for certain dangerous offenders in order to better protect the public. But, ultimately, let's look at what this means: Ultimately,

despite the best efforts of crowns to oppose bail for violent offenders, the decision to retain or release an individual on bail is made by the judge or justice of the peace at an appropriate hearing. Politicians cannot and should not be deciding who is released on bail.

The independence of the judiciary is one of the hallmarks of our justice system, and it needs to remain so. One of the fundamental principles of our justice system is that the judiciary must be free to make decisions in court without any contact or influence being asserted by outside parties, including by elected representatives. The people of Ontario are entitled to the assurance that judges will be impartial and that their decisions will be based on law, not politics. Here's what the former Attorney General, Jim Flaherty, said when in office. This is in Hansard. In June 2000, the former Attorney General, Jim Flaherty, commented in the Legislature about the process for opposing bail in responding to a question by an opposition member, Frances Lankin, Beaches—East York, with regard to the case regarding Gillian Hadley, a mother of three who was murdered by her estranged husband, who had violated bail conditions twice. Here's what the Honourable Jim Flaherty said:

"Indeed, in these circumstances, I'm told through the local crown attorney, on the second hearing that took place the crown prosecutor opposed bail being granted." However, "those decisions, as the member opposite should know, are ... made by the presiding judge, not by the crown." That's what Mr. Flaherty had to say when it came to this issue with regard to bail.

The reverse onus is a significant step in the right direction. I support it, our Premier supports it and we support Prime Minister Harper's initiative on this, as does Mayor Miller. But there are number of other initiatives that matter to Ontarians when it comes to addressing crime in Ontario. The investment of 1,000 new police officers has meant \$37 million every year in perpetuity to help municipalities hire those 1,000 police officers. Five hundred of these new officers will target key areas identified by the Premier, including youth crime, guns and gangs, organized crime and domestic violence; the remaining 500 will focus on community policing.

1550

I know that in Sault Ste. Marie this has meant eight new police officers, and in the north, 60 officers were carved out of that 1,000. They're fully funded because of some of the municipalities' challenges to participate in the program and pay for that cost. It has been tremendously positive in Sault Ste. Marie, in my community. For the first time ever, the province has stepped forward and paid the full cost for city police officers. It's historic. It's going in the right direction.

In a local news article following this, it says:

"A 'delighted' Mayor John Rowswell hoped the new officers translate into an increased police presence in the city's downtown and more night patrols.

"That ongoing visibility can be more effective, he said, than assigning the police service's street team as needed to problem areas.

"We just tried to make the best resources of what we had, so having eight additional officers is amazingly wonderful!" news. That's what he had to say about our initiative, which is very positive.

I can add to that. The deputy police chief, Bob Kates, said, "This will give us a wonderful opportunity to put officers back on patrol to answer calls and to do general patrol work." That's what Bob Kates, the deputy police chief in Sault Ste. Marie, had to say about this initiative, which is incredibly important to Ontarians. I would add again that this is historic.

The guns and gangs task force is another step in the right direction of combating crime that our government, the McGuinty government, is taking. The task force is made up of senior police officers and specialized crown prosecutors who work together from day one on an investigation. The crowns provide early legal advice to police, especially on search warrants and other issues arising from an investigation. They will also, where appropriate, get legal authorization for the police to conduct wiretaps. After charges are laid by police, the crowns prepare and conduct prosecutions. This is a special initiative that matters to Ontarians when it comes to combating crime in the province of Ontario.

We've also introduced—we're the first province to do this—gunshot wound reporting. We have made it mandatory by legislation that these gunshot wounds be reported by health professionals. Until our government took this step, this was not something that was mandatory. This will obviously help us move more quickly to address issues related to crime when a handgun is involved.

We've conducted blitz inspections of gun businesses to ensure gun storage and safekeeping standards are being met. This is another important step.

Through the gun amnesty program, in partnership with the Toronto Police Service, we have taken 261 guns off the streets, including a significant number of handguns, the type of weapon most often used in these types of shootings.

Community impact evidence has indicated that innovative new ways for crown prosecutors to bring community impact evidence before the courts is achieving tougher sentences in the system.

Our Attorney General is leading the discussion with the federal government, and his call for zero tolerance on gun crimes is being heard loud and clear. The federal government introduced legislation to increase mandatory minimum sentences for trafficking guns and to introduce two new offences to target gun theft. These are very important steps in addressing the issue around gun violence in the province of Ontario.

In addition, we have introduced new grow-op legislation to help local authorities identify and combat indoor marijuana grow operations. The illicit drug trade is a significant impetus that fuels the illicit firearms market. As we all know, these markets are very lucrative, and since firearms often command between two and five times their original cost, it's important that we have the

tools necessary to get at those individuals who participate in this type of criminal activity.

There are a number of other initiatives—I could go on and on—that support a healthy province, a healthy Ontario, in terms of addressing gun crime. I would say that it's worth pointing out for the record that we are taking these steps, in contrast to the past government, which cut \$181 million from the public safety ministry in 2003 and cut a further \$6 million from the Ministry of the Attorney General, and allowed on their watch a decline in police officers per capita of 8%. It's definitely a different story on this side of the Legislature, where we have made significant investments. I won't get into the NDP record on policing, other than to say that the police officers and community representatives who are the professionals and on the front lines in policing had some very negative things to say about the lack of support from the NDP.

It's important to be tough on criminals, but it's also important to be supportive of the root causes of criminal activity. I want to just reference a couple of things before I share some time with my colleagues, who I know are very anxious to speak to this motion. The community and social services ministry was gutted by the Conservative government between 1995 and 2002. The operating budget was cut by 17% and the capital budget was slashed by 57%. Between 1995 and 2002, rents increased by 24%. There were cuts for support for non-profit child care by \$66 million a year. The lowest-paid workers in Ontario saw no increase in their wages. When you continue, year after year, to ignore child development issues, to ignore education issues, to ignore the benefits of improving social programs, and you roll back social assistance and beat up on society's most vulnerable people, you help to create the conditions that allow people to gravitate to criminal activity. We need to ensure that in Ontario we are investing in the entire support network in all of these areas.

For the first time, we want to talk about the youth of our province being the future of Ontario. Here's a government on this side of the House that has created the first Ministry of Children and Youth Services, coordinated those services under the umbrella of one ministry, because we want to make a difference in the lives of the youngest and, in many cases, the most vulnerable Ontarians.

You can't take a look at this motion and chalk it up to simply saying it's a bail issue. It's a very complex issue. Our government has taken a multi-faceted approach to addressing not only the elements that occur at the end but prevention and all of these social programs that need to be addressed to support Ontarians, to reduce crime in the province.

I will not be supporting the motion.

I'd like to turn the floor over to my colleagues at this time.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): The preceding speaker finally commented on the motion before us to say he's not supporting it. He certainly didn't

talk about more accountability in the justice system, more transparency, and that is the nub of the motion before the House today, tabled by the Leader of the Opposition, John Tory.

I think it's interesting, some of the things that the member did talk about laterally, though, about children and youth services. It's important to take a look at what's happened in that youth justice system since the Liberal government took office. I think we have about half of the young offender beds in the province empty at the moment because most young offenders are now being diverted from the court system. Some people may say that's good, but I had an example I put on the record here of a police officer telling me about a 15-year-old stealing a car. Half an hour later he was caught. The officer asked me, "What do you think the penalty for that car theft was?" This was someone known to police. I had no idea. He said "A warning letter"—a warning letter. That's the kind of approach of the current Liberal government in terms of young offenders. We're seeing increasing problems with respect to young offenders in this province.

One of first things the McGuinty government did when they took office was close down a highly successful program called Project Turnaround, a camp that had seen dramatic improvements in recidivism. That's repeat offences—recidivism—people coming back into the system. It was working extremely well, but the Liberal government shut it down, cut off the funding and closed down that approach. It may take some time to see all of the impacts of their decisions in this respect, but certainly we're seeing it in terms of empty beds. And this is all a money-saving venture.

1600

We talk about accountability and transparency in the justice system. I think a lot of this boils down to a basic question about the McGuinty Liberal government—a couple of questions, really—focusing on honesty and on integrity. We've heard, on a whole range of issues, opposition parties and others in the public talking about the Liberal government doing anything and saying anything to get votes. We saw it in the last election when they promised the world, and now they have broken, I think, more than 50 promises. We saw an example a week or so ago where the Attorney General appeared before the justice committee talking about the human rights legislation and promised the committee members that he would allow those hearings to go on until everyone had an opportunity to be heard. Two days later they brought in the axe, the hammer, the guillotine, whatever you want to call it, and shut off those people—after the taxpayers had paid \$100,000 plus for advertising to encourage people to appear before the committee. That is a typical approach of this government, and on the justice file it really stands out.

If you go back to 2005, which has been referred to as the summer of the gun in the city of Toronto, what was happening behind the curtains with the Liberal government was that they had retained a number of prominent people: Bill Currie, a former OPP superintendent—he

may have been a deputy commissioner at one time; I'm not sure—and George Thomson, a former deputy in justice at the federal level, who was one of the folks responsible for the implementation of the gun registry at the federal level. These folks came in and did a review in terms of how they could cut \$339 million out of the justice system in Ontario. That was the goal of the McGuinty government, to gut the justice system in the province, leading up to the summer of the gun in 2005. What was the approach of our great crime fighter, the Attorney General? He tries to portray himself as a great crime fighter. He had signed off on that. He had signed off on gutting the justice system in Ontario. His counterpart, the Minister of Community Safety, Mr. Kwinter, had signed off on that document. It had already been through some of the cabinet committee review processes. Then, of course, we had the significant gun crime during the summer of 2005.

Because we were able to access freedom of information, we found out that the Attorney General had taken the whole summer off. While all those shootings were occurring in Toronto, where was the Attorney General?

Mr. John Yakubuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): AWOL.

Mr. Runciman: AWOL, missing in action.

Again, this hadn't clicked in. This had not clicked in with the McGuinty government. They were still going down the path of cutting in the justice system. Then, of course, the public outcry started to grow and grow and grow, and we found out some of the things that were happening. They were going to do away with the Ontario Board of Parole. We raised it in this Legislature and they backed away from that. They were going to gut the Criminal Intelligence Service Ontario. We found out about that and raised it in here, and they backed away from that. There was a whole range of things that they were prepared to gut prior to the you-know-what hitting the fan.

Then again, it's a case of looking at the polls, reading the tea leaves and saying, "What should we do politically to deal with this? We thought we could get away with this massive gutting of the justice system, but now it's the number one issue in a lot of Ontario, certainly in the greater Toronto region, in the GTA. We have to start acting like this never happened, that we weren't planning to do this, that we're really concerned about justice issues." It hasn't been reflected in many of the actions taken by this government, and I think this is an area that, in terms of accountability in the justice system, the public wants to see addressed.

I would probably, in some respects, go a little further than our leader with respect to the reporting that is required in this area. I think there is a significant need to know what's going on in the courts. I'll get into a little bit of detail from "A Judge's Alarm," which was an editorial in the *Globe and Mail* yesterday that touched on some comments made by Mr. Justice Michael Moldaver of the Ontario Court of Appeal. I think he has some legitimate concerns. But I think as well that the public

has a right to know what's going on in individual courts. That's my view, not necessarily the party's view. And I think if we're looking at this, one of the problems in the court is remands—remand after remand after remand plugging the system. I think we should know where that's occurring, what courts that is occurring in.

We get into these issues, and every time you raise one of these issues—the Premier used the name of Chief Justice McMurtry today to say that this is again interference jeopardizing judicial independence. Any time you want to raise one of these issues, that's the big bogeyman: "Oh, we can't jeopardize judicial independence." We can't question what's happening in the courts in the province of Ontario because we're somehow jeopardizing the independence of the judiciary. Obviously there is a fine line here, but I think it's the sort of thing that if the government would move towards introducing legislation, we could have an opportunity in this House, through the justice committee or through a select committee, to look at these kinds of issues, to bring in representatives of the judiciary, to bring in others who perhaps have a different view of this from the legal profession, and find out where that balance should be. Right now, I think it's weighted too far on the side of protecting the judiciary—covering them up, if you will—from criticism. Or not necessarily criticism but awareness of what's happening—

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): To shine a light on it.

Mr. Runciman: To shine a light, as my colleague from Fort Erie says, on what's happening.

Certainly we know, even if you listen to Justice Moldaver, that the courts are in a mess, and it's not all a fault of the judiciary. We know Justice Moldaver talks about the defence bar and the problems that the defence bar is creating. Of course, the *Globe* editorial also mentions that the defence bar is up in arms over the judge's speeches. Well, I know that when I've referenced the defence bar in the past, they've been up in arms about some of my comments as well.

These people are not above criticism; they are not above scrutiny. That's the sort of thing that we have to focus on as a Legislature. Get rid of the partisan baloney that the previous speaker—he devoted all his efforts here today to partisan balderdash instead of dealing with the problems that the courts in this province are facing. We're talking about 100,000 criminal cases in the system for more than eight months. Why is that happening?

I've referenced this in the past as well when talking to a provincial judge who was a former police officer, one of the last lay people appointed to the bench. I think we need more lay people on the bench; of course, the legal profession will scalp me for saying that. But this gentleman was a former police officer, and he went into a relief position in the community of Stratford, I believe, where there was something like a three- to six-month backlog. Most of it was based on remands, and he would not put up with it. If you'd had two or three remands, you weren't going to come in with a headache or a toothache or whatever and get another remand: "You've had suffi-

cient opportunity to prepare for this case. I'm not going to excuse you; I'm not going to allow another remand. Get on with the case," and he brought down the gavel. He cleared up that backlog in about two or three weeks. That's the kind of approach that we need more of on the bench.

I want to say that I think we need this kind of information to be made available. At the end of the day, some of it may have to be retained within the Ministry of the Attorney General, but we need to know what's going on. We need to know what's going on, in my view, on an individual, court-by-court basis. Perhaps that's the kind of information that should not be made public, but I think that's the sort of thing that should be open to a very thorough discussion and review by a committee of this Legislature, with very widespread public input into those kinds of decisions.

I think there are all sorts of problems. My leader mentioned sureties not being collected. We know that's a real problem out there—and remands and bail. We talked about reverse onus as some sort of panacea. Well, if we don't have some kind of reporting mechanisms in place, how are we going to know if this is having any real impact? We won't have any clue whatsoever about what's happening.

1610

I had some information dropped on my desk, and I don't know where it has gone. It was just brought in in the last minute. I don't know if it went onto my colleague's desk. It was about how easy bail raises tough questions and about some of the folks who have been granted bail in Toronto. We've used this anecdotal statistic, which is based on police telling us this, of about 40% of people charged with firearms offences being granted bail. Well, we shouldn't have to rely on anecdotal statistics, and we shouldn't have to rely on saying, "Well, we've done wonderful things with respect to reverse onus, both at the federal and provincial levels, because this is going to happen." But then, at the end of the day, because we have no measuring stick available, we won't know if it has been helpful, unhelpful or neutral with respect to people. Obviously, I don't think it's going to eliminate these kinds of situations where people are committing crimes while out on bail, but, again, we don't know. We don't have the information to deal with all of these challenges.

I encourage the Liberal members to rethink their position in opposing this as sort of a knee-jerk reaction because it's brought forward by the official opposition. I think this motion makes good sense. As my colleague has suggested, it shines a light on what's happening in the justice system, and I think it will drive improvements in the justice system. So I encourage support from all parties in this place.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches—East York): This is an opposition day motion, and I am going to state at the outset that I'm going to support this motion. I'm not going to support this motion because I think it answers all the questions, but it does answer some of them.

I'd like to preface my remarks by stating, first and foremost, I am supportive in this country of our system of justice, the courts, the justices of the peace, the judges, the entire gamut from the lowliest court to the Supreme Court of Canada. In fact, when I was questioned by a student a number of years ago about our political system and about my pride in the political system, I had to inform that student that as proud as I was of the political system and of democracy as it exists in this country, I was even prouder of the system of courts that we have established, where every person can go before the court, is presumed innocent until proven guilty, where every person has an opportunity to argue his case and where justice, by and large, and almost universally, is blind, so that a person has the opportunity to go and have their day in court. I continue to believe that is the hallmark and one of the most clearly visible and wonderful parts of the system of government in this country.

I am supportive of the crown attorneys, would that there were more of them. That is a very difficult job. Everyone who has ever been inside of a courtroom knows the difficulty of a crown attorney having to balance far too many cases with far too few resources, having to broker deals, when he or she knows that the deals being made are not necessarily in the best interests of the community, just simply to get the case off the books so that they can deal with others. They have an unenviable job. If ever the federal government needs to spend more money, it is on getting more judges, more justices of the peace, more crown attorneys to adequately deal with the volume of cases before our courts.

I'm supportive, of course, of our police and all of the officers of the court who have to go forward on a daily basis to give evidence, both against and on behalf of people who are accused of crime, the police to gather the evidence to present it in an unbiased way and to try to make a case when oftentimes it is very difficult circumstances and the officers of the court, everyone from the probation and parole officers to the psychiatrist to everyone else who has to come forward and offer that evidence.

The question we have before us is one of proof for detention. In this country, as I prefaced my remarks, the preface itself is that you are presumed to be innocent until proven guilty. What is being asked here is to reverse the onus on whether or not a person is released pending trial, to presume that he or she is likely to be a danger to the public or will flee the jurisdiction—those are the two major arguments—or in fact whether or not they can be trusted to show up and not commit any crimes in the intervening period.

As I've often said in this forum before, I worked for many years in the immigration department. Certainly in the last 12 years of my employment in that department, I worked as the counsel to the Minister of Immigration. It was my job to go before the Immigration and Refugee Board and argue on behalf of the minister—in much the same way as a crown attorney would argue in court—a whole broad range of things, including bail hearings. The

onus was upon me in those circumstances to prove to the court that a person was either a danger to himself or to the public or, in the alternative, that they were likely to flee the jurisdiction. It was a difficult thing to do. Even when we knew that the person was not likely to appear or when we feared against all fear itself that the person would go out and commit additional crimes, unfortunately the way the law was structured and continues to be structured, the person would be set free. It was a very difficult time and a circumstance which I rely upon in my statements that I'm making here today.

The onus, in my view, clearly should be on the person seeking to be released whenever there is a reasonable case to be made that the person is either a danger to themselves or to the public. If there is a weapon involved, particularly if a gun or a weapon that can harm severely is involved, in my mind the onus should be reversed. I have always believed that, and I believe that today. That is why I am supporting this motion.

We have two systems of justice in this country. We have the system of justice which I am describing, which is the common law, in which a person is deemed to be innocent until proven guilty. But we only have to go a couple of hundred kilometres across the border to Quebec where they have the Napoleonic law, which is exactly the opposite. It is incumbent upon the individual to prove that they are not guilty rather than on the crown to prove that they are. The Napoleonic—

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): The criminal law is the same.

Mr. Prue: The criminal law is the same, but the civil procedure under Napoleonic law is very different. My friend opposite is correct. He has found a little tiny nuance. The criminal law is identical, and of course it is, but the procedure of the courts is somewhat different, having come from two different traditions, one based in France, the other in England.

I remember a very tragic case that haunts me to this day, a very tragic case which I dealt with before the Immigration Appeal Board, or the Immigration and Refugee Board, as it later became. That was a gentleman who was convicted of many crimes and almost all of his crimes involved violence. They involved robbery, assault, assault with weapons, gun-related crimes, possession of illegal firearms. He was, in the course of events, ordered deported. He had the right of appeal to the Immigration and Refugee Board. He came before the board. I was successful in arguing to that board that his appeal ought to be dismissed. I was also successful on that day in arguing that he ought not to be allowed on bail during the course of the hearing nor should he be allowed on bail pending any subsequent appeal to the federal court of Canada. The board determined that he should be detained, and in fact he was detained. But unfortunately in the justice system and in the system of the immigration department, because it takes a long time sometimes to effect deportations, and he was not very co-operative nor was his family in obtaining a passport, a few months later he was released by an adjudicator. He

was out on the street for about a week when he murdered a young police constable of the city of Toronto.

I never met Todd Baylis, who was that police officer. But when I am in the west end of the city, when I am by Black Creek Drive, when I do go by the police station, there is a street there named in honour of Todd Baylis. I have stopped there on a number of occasions to think about the waste of that young man's life, who was performing a duty for the citizens of this city and of this country, whose life was wasted by a gentleman who ought not ever to have been granted bail, given the circumstances of who and what he was and what he was doing: the fact that he was facing deportation, the fact that he was enamoured of guns, the fact that every crime he committed was with a gun, and ultimately this is what happened. Had the law been clearer, had the law been tougher, had the law seen that the onus was upon him, not upon the crown and not upon the case presenting officer, whoever it was, who argued that he had to remain in custody long after I had finished with him, I am sure that Todd Baylis would be alive today, and I am sure that the system of justice would not have suffered in any way whatsoever.

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I look to the direction given to crown attorneys and what the Premier answered today about this very weighty issue when he informed this House that in fact the crown attorneys have already been told to oppose bail. But I think what this is asking for is somewhat more and somewhat more important, and that is to reverse the onus. The government says it's already been done, but I have to question that. I have to question, when the Prime Minister of this country, a man—I'll be very blunt; I did not vote for him or his party—who, when he referred a few weeks ago to a very tragic case as well—I'm not going to get into the case, but he referred to the case of Ahmed Moalin-Mohamed and questioned how a man with so many convictions and so many outstanding charges could be released by a justice of the peace. I'm not going to state what the crime is or whether or not he's guilty, but it begs the question—and the Prime Minister, of course, was right in this—how could he have been released by a justice of the peace to move to Toronto and to stay with his mother?

I can only answer that question by looking at the statistics of what justices of the peace do in this province of Ontario. In the last year for which we have statistics, 2003-04, there were 59 complaints laid against justices of the peace on bail procedures, complaints about releasing people who ought not to have been released. They had 39 complaints outstanding from the previous year, for a total of 98 complaints. In that year, 2003-04, the Justices of the Peace Review Council reviewed one case, one case out of 98. And in that one case, they found that the justice of the peace, of course, was absolutely correct in what he had done. But I have to question, if this is in fact what is happening, if the number of people who are being released and the questions about those releases result in only one investigation by the review council of the

justices of the peace, are we doing the proper job by and for the people of this province?

The motion today talks about tracking documents. The motion today says that we need statistics. I am never afraid of statistics. Mark Twain once said that there are lies and damned lies, and then there are statistics, but I will tell you that I don't necessarily hold to all of that. I think that if we have something that needs to be proven, if we have a scientific approach to the obtaining of the statistics, then we will be able to better judge where we are going and why we are going there. The Attorney General already documents and has statistics. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to obtain them. Unfortunately, to obtain many of the facts and figures that we need to properly judge what is happening in these circumstances, we have to go for freedom of information; we have to lay down a lot of money, we have to go through a lot of work if we're in opposition to try to find this.

We need these statistics and we need them to be released. If there is nothing to hide, then it's very, very simple to say, "We have had 1,000 bail hearings, we have had 500 granted bail and 500 not. These are the circumstances where they were granted; these are the ones where they're not." I'm not asking for individual judges, even though I believe the judges ought not to be afraid of their decision-making. Certainly, when I worked in the immigration department, before I was counsel to the minister and held deportation hearings, they kept statistics on the number of cases that I released, and they kept statistics on the number that I let into the country and the number that I deported. It never seemed to cause any grief to me or to the people who worked with me. We did our job. We were not ashamed of what we did, nor should the judges be as well.

I'm going to go on. We need to look, though, at what is not contained in this motion, because I am somewhat troubled by it. I'm going to support it because in two areas it goes in the right direction: in reversing the onus and in getting the necessary statistics. But crime is a very complex matter, and there is a lot more that needs to be looked at. I would be remiss if I did not talk about what is not in here but needs to be in here.

I listened to the member from Sault Ste. Marie. Although oftentimes I have a hard time following his train of thought because it is biased—I don't know how else to put it; it's very partisan; he's always taking shots at what other people did 50 or 100 years ago—in the end he did say something which was true: that crime is a complex subject and that we need to look not only at what is being recommended here today but at what else is needed.

I think we need better community policing. I know that in the last election the government promised 1,000 new police officers. I know that only a portion of those have been delivered. I know, and we all know, that the municipalities do not have the pecuniary resources to pay the 50% or whatever they are required to pay to hire those new police officers.

We need to look at the whole issue of where these guns come from in the first place. It is trite to say that they cross the border from the United States, that they are smuggled in on boats or in the back of cars or in trunks or on people's bodies, that they are brought into this country. We need to know where those guns are coming from and we need to stop the importation, legal or illegal, of handguns.

As a society, we made a decision a long time ago that we do not, like the Americans, have the right to bear arms, nor do people in this country believe that ordinary citizens should be armed. I know that there are people who hunt. As a Canadian, I acknowledge that that is there, that they have rifles, that they go out and have a sport of hunting. But I cannot for the life of me imagine any use for handguns. I know there are some people who shoot targets with them, but apart from that, a handgun serves no hunting purpose and, apart from target practice, is used for only one thing. I think the government should make the strongest possible case to put people who have these guns illegally in jail.

There's been no talk today about youth at risk. We have youth at risk in this country for a wide variety of reasons. Primarily, the youth who are at risk live in poverty. Many times they are people of colour. Many times they are recent immigrants. But one thing is sure, that they have lost faith in the system, and that to go out and to be in a gang and to have a gun and to do this kind of stuff is often the only thing they think they have left in their lives.

We in the NDP believe there are three pillars, not just the one that's being debated here today, but three pillars you need to do. The first one we're debating, the punishment and the deterrence. We need to make sure that people who are convicted of these crimes are punished. They need to be punished. They need to be sent to jail. They need to be deterred from this crime. I would be remiss, having worked for immigration for 20 years, not to say that if they are not Canadian citizens and they commit these violent acts, they ought to be removed from the country as well.

We need, as a second pillar, to enhance enforcement with proper resources so that there are enough police officers and peace officers of all descriptions to make sure that people are dissuaded from breaking the law.

Thirdly, we need to look at crime prevention. We need to go into our communities with programs for our youth, we need to have resources and job opportunities, we need to have education, so they don't get into crimes in the first place.

I'd like to conclude with some other suggestions which are not contained in the body of the motion but which need to be dealt with and need to be spoken about in any issue about crime. I think the Prime Minister is right: We need to arm our border officers. I worked, as I said, in immigration for many years. Officers working at border points, particularly those who are alone after midnight, would often encounter a great many difficulties with criminal elements coming in from the United States

at those points. Certainly, they need to be adequately armed and trained, and what's even better is to make sure they are not alone.

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Number two, we need to increase the mandatory minimum sentences when people are found to have used a gun in the commission of a felony. There should be an automatic minimum sentence that is tagged on to any crime involving guns. We need to make sure that under the criminal justice system, youths who are 16 years of age or older are tried as adults when they are in possession of, and use, guns in the commission of a crime. Having a gun stuck in your face in a holdup inside a variety store is one of the most traumatic experiences any person could possibly experience or encounter in their lifetime, and it makes little difference whether that person is 16, 17, 18 or 55 years of age. If a gun is put into your face and someone has the wherewithal to pull that trigger, they need to be charged as an adult.

We need to enhance our witness protection programs so that people are not afraid to come forward and testify against gangs and youths and people with guns, and people who are bent on violence. Our witness protection program, in spite of the Hollywood programs you might see in the United States and on CSI, are woefully inadequate in this country. There is very little protection for people in the witness protection program, and oftentimes witnesses are intimidated not to come forward.

We need to stop illegal weapons sales on the Internet, which are growing exponentially, and we need to have police officers going on to the Net and doing the same kind of good job they are doing to stop child pornography. If that means going out and buying guns and infiltrating and that kind of stuff, that needs to be done as well.

We need to ensure that the proceeds of crime go back to the community. This is very important. This was recommended by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and is absolutely important if communities are to buy into this. If the proceeds of crime go back to the communities, which, after all, pay for the policing in the majority of cases, then there will be a much bigger buy-in in the community.

We need to integrate the task forces of our police so that they work together co-operatively and so there are not jurisdictions that you might find in the city of Toronto with the Toronto police, the OPP, the RCMP and a whole plethora of other groups of police or public agencies that enforce various laws—everything from customs to immigration and so on. We need to make sure all that is integrated.

Last but not least, we need to keep our youth out of criminal activities; we need to make sure they have a future. As the member from Sault Ste. Marie said—I don't think quite that eloquently, although I do give him credit for having said it—you cannot expect a whole group of people who grow up in poverty and despair to have any other dream in some cases than to go out onto the streets. We have to snap that; we have to stop that. If

that means stopping the clawback, then stop the clawback. If that means giving adequate resources so that you are not living in poverty, so that you are not the child of somebody on ODSP or welfare who has to go to food banks, then do that. I will tell you again, as a boy from Regent Park, that there is nothing quite as bad—being poor is not that bad—as growing up and seeing affluence all around you of which you are not a part. That is really what motivates people to crimes. You need to stop that.

In conclusion, I am asking the members opposite who have already indicated their unwillingness to support this measure to reconsider. It is but a very small and partial measure, but if the onus is reversed and it is more difficult, even by a smidgen, for people to be denied bail, to stay in jail when they have been found in possession of illegal firearms, when they have used guns in the commission of violent acts or in criminal activity, then make it more difficult for them to get out on bail. If you need more statistics, if the statistics are needed to show that the justice system is working, then have those statistics generally available to all the people of the province.

As a person who reads the newspapers every day, and I am sure all of the people in this room do, if you read them, you would think that the incidence of violent crime is increasing, and yet we know from statistics, and we go back to them again, that in fact that may not be the case. The number of murders has declined in Toronto after having spiked for one year. The number of other violent crimes has gone down. The number of robberies has decreased. Yet people are fearful. They are fearful because they see these high-profile cases of people on bail committing other crimes and being released again. We need to stop that fear. They are fearful because they do not know the statistics of what is actually happening in the courtroom. They are fearful because they know the justice system takes too long and that criminals or purported criminals or alleged criminals are allowed to walk free because a year or two or three years may go by before the case actually comes to trial.

We all need to work harder. We need to assuage those fears. We need to make people know they are safe. We need to do what is incumbent upon us: that every person is in fact safe.

So I commend the leader of the official opposition for bringing forward this motion. I will be supporting the motion. In the end, I ask all of us not only to do what is being asked here today but also to turn our attention to the root causes of crime and what needs to be done, and to do it.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough-Rouge River): I am pleased to join in the debate and add a few comments to the motion by the opposition.

The motion seems to indicate that the general interest here is to collect statistics, but let me tell you that from the 17 years I spent in municipal politics, I always read motions very carefully and look for the hitch clause, because there is always a hook that will get you and that has a hidden agenda to it.

Let me read you one of the clauses of this motion. It says, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government

should seek a review of all orders granting bail for charges involving violent crimes.” The mover of the motion seemed to indicate that he was not interested in doing any review of the justice system in terms of judging what the judges are doing in court etc. The last speaker spoke about statistics as being important. But, you know, statistics can be used in many ways, and that hitch clause, as I call it, is what scares the daylights out of me, because those statistics can be used for other reasons that maybe this government does not realize at the time we are debating this. Statistics are fine, but I have to ask, what are these statistics going to do to improve safety in my community, to improve crime in the city and crime in the province? I have to say to you that I’m not convinced statistics will do it all on their own.

The previous speaker talked about three pillars, and I have to agree with him on those three pillars, but I would add one more. There is a pillar missing that he did not mention. To me, especially when young people are incarcerated, the system has failed to deal with them while they are incarcerated to prepare them to re-enter society, to prepare them so that when they come back out, they can find a job and be someone who makes a contribution to society. That’s the other pillar that we should all be thinking about, where we are going in dealing with crime in our communities.

This government agrees that we should be tough on crime, but at the same time, you have to understand that you must invest in the root causes of crime. I believe the McGuinty government has really focused on that, and I want to share with the members who are here today some of those initiatives. I can relate to them because some of them are actually working in my riding today, and I have to tell you that the comments from the community are very positive.

Student success: The McGuinty government is continuing to invest in student success programs to reduce the dropout rate and to create new opportunities for all students. The bill that is in front of us, learning to age 18, is a big move in the direction to make sure students succeed, to make sure that students come out of our educational system and make a contribution to society. That’s a very important bill of this government, and we’re looking forward to that.

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I can tell you that the young people in my community are very proud to say that they would love to see that bill in place and all the counsellors put back into the institutions where they go to school, so that they can get the help that they need when they fall into trouble, they can get the help that they need in school that they can’t get at home because they are from working families. Mom and dad are not home to help them. Mom and dad are not there to see that they get their homework done. That’s the kind of thing that people in my riding are saying they need from us, and we are responding to that.

We are investing more into the attention that is being paid in classrooms. We’ve invested in 1,900 new high

school teachers over three years—800 teachers dedicated to student success. That’s what we need. We need to make sure that young people have opportunity so that they don’t turn to crime or can be influenced by someone to turn to crime. That’s what we have to change and then we will not have to deal with statistics of crime.

This government has also invested in lowering class sizes. You hear about that from our government a lot. We need to go out and speak to the teachers who now have classes of 20 or less. They will tell you that it is a real pleasure to teach in those classes because they can see the students responding to them. There is a more personal relationship because of that smaller class. That is a huge success story of this government instead of worrying about the crime. We need to invest in our young people and we need to invest in the root causes of crime.

The government has realized that young people are very important to us. Young people are our future. We decided that we were going to create a Ministry of Children and Youth Services completely dedicated to young people. That ministry has been very active in doing things that deal with young people to make sure that, in the future, we will not be dealing with the crime problems we’ve had of the years gone by.

I will say to you, as a member of municipal government in years gone by, that the downloading created by previous governments really affected our communities. I used to be a soccer coach. I coached soccer for 16 years. I coached young people. A lot of the young boys I coached came out of housing developments where the parents didn’t have a chance. I can tell you that when I was coaching I would coach my boys year-round. The school system was free. I could take the kids into the school gym and coach them in the winter months; they could play outdoors in the summer months. Then the government came along and downloaded onto municipalities. I couldn’t afford the fees for the gym, so I stopped coaching. Now who lost? The young people lost because I no longer made myself available to them. And I enjoyed it; I did it for 16, 17 years.

This government has reinvested in some of the schools. We’re reopening those schools and making them available to the community. The community is bringing back programs for young people in those schools so our young people are not on the streets, they’re not throwing rocks at their neighbour’s homes and they’re not committing crimes. We need to do those things and we need to do it more.

The ministry has also invested in child care. They’ve invested in 25,000 new child care spaces. The opposition party that moved this motion can help our government. We’ve announced a Best Start program and the federal government has not come to the table to be part of it. The previous government did; they signed an agreement with us. This new government has torn up that agreement. We’re asking our friends in the opposition party, “Pick up the phone. Call your friends in Ottawa. Tell them what we need. Tell them we need to invest in young people. Tell them we need to invest in day care so that young moms and dads can go to work, build a strong

family and build a future for their family.” Those are the kinds of things we need to do and do more of.

This government also implemented three increases to the minimum wage. What does that do for poor folks? It really gives them a chance in life to improve their income, to improve their status in the community and to improve their financial status. We would love to do more. We will, as we move forward. But I can say to you that the community that I represent is very proud of what this government is doing to try to help them out.

I just want to turn these comments also to some of the things that are causing a problem in my community today. We need to do more on that file. Years ago, the first marijuana grow operation that I ever discovered in my riding—we discovered it because two gangs were shooting at each other, and there were actually two fatalities on the front lawn of that particular house. A gun was involved. The Premier and the Prime Minister and the mayor of Toronto just stood together talking tough on gun crime. I’m really happy that we finally got three levels of government actually agreeing that they’re going to bring in legislation that gun crimes will actually see sentences that are much, much tougher.

But I would like to appeal to the federal government also. I’ve seen in my particular riding operators of grow-ops get caught, and they’re back out on the street in a couple of weeks. We need to be tough at the federal level to change the Criminal Code so that those people who are caught in marijuana grow operations are put away for longer times. To be honest with you, every marijuana grow operation carries with it people who are involved in crime, and anybody who is involved in marijuana grow operations, the majority of times, is carrying a gun. So we need to put the guns together with the marijuana grow operations, and we need to appeal to our friends at the federal level. Again, I say that my colleagues in the opposition party, who are closer to the government in Ottawa, can make that phone call and help us out. We need to be tough on gun crime, but we also need to be tough on the marijuana grow operations that are becoming a blight to our community, to be honest with you.

This government has introduced legislation that makes it easier for our emergency workers to deal with the marijuana grow operations. They have received legislation; we’re helping them to get into a safer environment where marijuana is grown. But we need more, and that more has to come from the federal level. I would urge my colleagues over on the opposition side to do something for us by speaking to their friends in Ottawa, who can really help us. If they could just pick up the phone and make that one phone call, it would really be beneficial to all of us.

I will close by saying that I don’t think the opposition really understands our community. I don’t think they understand the word on the street, and the word on the street is that this government is tough on crime but we’re also investing in the root causes of crime, and we need to do more of that.

I will be voting against this particular motion.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): It is clear to me that while we’ve heard a lot in recent weeks regarding crime committed by those on bail—on easy bail, as we just heard from the member from Leeds–Grenville—it really is high time for this government to back up some of those sentiments with some action.

Catch and release is taking a toll on our society. While this government continues to turn a blind eye, it is the people of Ontario, really, who are forced to bear the brunt. Many of us saw Mr. McGuinty before the cameras with our Prime Minister for a federal announcement regarding bail conditions. I applaud the movement on this file from our federal counterparts. I wonder when it will be time for this government and for this Premier to show some leadership and to address the current catch-and-release justice system, the status quo system, with, at minimum, somewhat of a made-in-Ontario direction. Clearly, Ottawa recently has taken additional action, and it is time for this Ontario government to follow suit. Quite frankly, given the track record, I’m really not holding out much hope with this current regime.

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In December 2004, we proposed to Premier McGuinty that he convene a summit where elected representatives from all parties would work together to find some better solutions, and we’re still waiting for that summit to be convened. Who knows? Maybe last week’s photo op will pave the way for some movement from this Premier, but again, I’m not holding my breath.

More recently, our PC caucus tabled an amendment to Bill 14. This would have required the Attorney General to report annually on the number of bail violations and the number of sureties collected as a result of bail violations. Now, this is predictable. The McGuinty Liberals voted that amendment down on October 5, 2006. None of this really is surprising, however.

I ask those assembled to consider the mess that this government has allowed to continue in my riding during the ongoing occupation of Caledonia, where many in that area and across Ontario, indeed across the Dominion of Canada, have questioned the lack of action of this Ontario government to restore the rule of law.

This summer, I travelled briefly south of Buffalo. I was intrigued with news south of the border regarding a fellow named Ralph “Bucky” Phillips. He was then a fugitive. He was on the run for attempted murder of a New York state trooper. My wife and I were in the town of Randolph, New York. We personally observed dozens of the hundreds of New York state troopers involved in this manhunt. I brought back one of the “Wanted” posters.

In contrast, in Caledonia, in the Six Nations area, we also have a man at large. This is a very serious charge. It’s an outstanding arrest warrant, in this case, for the attempted murder of a police officer. I’ve seen no “Wanted” posters. I see no evidence of a massive manhunt.

Far from being an abstraction, the rule of law is truly central not only to our political system but to our

economic system, and in order for any society to achieve peace and stability, there must be a deeply rooted and widely accepted decision-making apparatus based on the rule of law, and, specifically to the motion we're debating this afternoon, including tough conditions on bail.

We now have a government in Ontario that has found a way to tacitly signal its willingness to tolerate suspensions of the rule of law. On June 12, Premier McGuinty set two conditions for continuing land negotiations at Caledonia Six Nations. The very next day, he reversed his stand on both conditions. Despite his threat to halt the negotiations until suspects were handed over—and I made reference to this outstanding warrant for the attempted murder of a police officer in Caledonia—Premier McGuinty caved and restarted negotiations and, by so doing, lost credibility and showed he was willing to accept the blatant refusal to comply with the rule of law.

As for me, I personally believe that abdicating the rule of law does not help anyone's cause in the long run. This abdication by the Ontario Liberals does not help the native cause, for example, in the Caledonia area. While ignoring his own conditions, the Premier has tacitly disregarded the attempted murder of a police officer, given away land—I think of the Burtch example—before commencing negotiations, and undermined our community's and our province's faith in a proud police force.

You'll forgive me, Speaker, if I don't have much faith in this government to embark on concrete action, to embark on a process to get tough on crime and to crack down on bail violators. That's why I thought it was important to speak on our opposition motion today and to remind members opposite of their responsibility to community safety, to help kick-start them into action to ensure the very safety of our residents in this great province of Ontario.

I join my caucus members in calling for this government to do a number of things: First, ensure that crown attorneys oppose bail for all violent crimes; second, seek a review of all bail granted in charges involving violent crimes; and third, make the justice system more transparent and accountable by starting to collect and make public statistics on bail orders and other court proceedings, something the McGuinty Liberals to date have refused to do.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I'm pleased to have a few minutes here to speak to this opposition day motion. For those who are watching us on television, they may wonder what are we debating. Basically, a motion has been put forward by the opposition that calls upon the government to "adopt a policy to direct crown attorneys to oppose the making of all orders for bail for violent crimes;

"That ... the government should seek a review of all orders granting bail for charges involving violent crimes;

"That ... the issue of crimes alleged to be committed by people already out on bail is of increasing concern to the people of Ontario;

"That" there's a "a lack of statistics relating to bail orders....; and

"That ... the government should begin providing more detailed information on the justice system in order to ensure Ontarians have an accurate picture of whether the justice system is functioning well and in the best interests of public safety."

Let me start off by saying that the two key words in response to this motion are "reverse onus." We know that when it comes to bail and the seeking of bail, especially when it comes to violent crimes and things of this matter, the onus shifts to the accused to prove why they should be released. Unlike a regular court trial where the prosecution must prove their case, in a bail matter the person seeking bail has to prove their case. The onus is shifted, and that's why it's called a reverse onus. I know that our government has been very, very strong in supporting this particular position. We have continued to support the crown policy, which states clearly that on any gun violence, crown counsel are instructed to seek detention orders in all cases involving firearm-related offences, absent exceptional circumstances, and to always consider requesting a bail review if a detention order is denied. So even if the crown is not successful in preventing the bail, they can go a further step and request a bail review. Protection of the public is seen as the crown counsel's paramount consideration, and that's clear.

Another very important point to realize is that our court system is open to members of the public. I've had the opportunity, both as a lawyer and as a member of the public, to open the door when court is in session and sit down—I did this even before I became a lawyer, when I was thinking of becoming a lawyer—and watch a court case or a bail proceeding. You can see quite clearly that the proceedings are open. They're not closed or hidden; they're open and available for all to see. There is nothing we're hiding here. We have a policy in place that makes it quite clear that the accused in a gun crime has to show why they should be released from detention. This policy and practice has been in place for a while, and our government is strongly supportive of keeping it that way. In fact, we also want to ensure that if an accused is able to get bail, the crown should seek bail review. The decision to seek bail review is an independent decision made by the crown. Basically, the crown would work with the local crown attorney and decide whether or not to look at a further review of the decision on the bail release.

1700

Other speakers from our government have spoken on various different issues, but I think it's really important to focus, to bring home the point that we strongly support the provisions in the Criminal Code that clearly state that it's the onus of the person who's trying to get out, who's been arrested or detained. If that person wants to get out, they have to prove and they have to give the reason why they should be allowed to be out. Even when that happens, the crown attorney, the government lawyer, can then try to seek a bail review, a review of that decision that the judge may have made, if that person gets out.

We don't want to see violent offenders out there, people who have got guns out there, and people who could potentially go out on bail and offend while they're

out on bail, committing offences. It's been pretty clear, in the three years that our government has been in power, that we've brought in a number of measures to ensure that we continue to be tough on crime. Those things go all the way back to the mandatory reporting of gunshot wounds, which was something new when our province brought it in. When someone gets shot and ends up in a hospital, the doctors or the people at the hospital have to report that to the police and to the authorities. Up to now, until that law was brought into place, a person could get shot, go to a hospital, get fixed up, and then just go back out on their merry way. Instead, we brought in a law which says, "You know what? If you come in with a gunshot wound—it may be accidental; it may be that you were on a hunting trip or something. But just in case you were involved in a gun crime or were part of a gun crime, that's got to be reported to the government authorities, to the police, to be looked at." That's one key step that we took, along with many other steps that I'm not going to repeat because they were mentioned by other people who have spoken here today.

Another important point that I want to make is that judges make the decisions on who gets bail, not the politicians. If we were to sit here today and say, "You know what? This person should get bail and that person should not get bail," then we're basically corrupting the separation, in my view, of the judiciary from the legislative. The basic principle of our government and our system is that the legislative stays separate from the judiciary. Judges and the judiciary should be free from tampering from a government. That's why we have in place certain laws that say even the Attorney General and members of this House cannot speak to certain matters that are before the courts, because we may influence those matters that are before the courts, and we want to make sure that people get a fair trial.

This motion today could end up becoming a slippery slope of telling crown attorneys and judges what to do. That becomes a fundamental problem, because once you start doing that, you begin to influence and to break that barrier between the legislative and the judiciary. Our parliamentary system and our democratic system here in Canada and in Ontario is built on that, and you want to make that clear with the provisions that are in the Criminal Code and with what we're planning to do.

Look at what happened yesterday in the federal government, when the federal Tories decided to call Quebec a nation. People are asking today, what does that mean? What is that? Is Quebec separate now? Is it its own country? Is it a nation? What is that? Should the natives in this country also be a nation? In the same sense, maybe the Ukrainian community or other communities that immigrated to Canada should also be nations. Maybe Ontario should be a nation. Maybe the west should be a nation. Again, if we bring forward and support a motion like this one where we begin to be, in my view, ambiguous and somewhat—

Interjection.

Mr. Berardinetti: The motion is a Conservative motion, and I'm saying that it could be ambiguous. What

it does is provide the opportunity for some people to interpret it as being something other than what it's meant to be. Why do you want to muck up the system and start saying something in the motion and to the judiciary that's not needed to be said? We're doing our things through our legislation, through various bills we've brought forward, to be tough on crime. Everyone heard last week of the Prime Minister, the Premier and the mayor getting together, getting tough on gun crimes. Their message is clear, and that's the way they should operate. So I find problems with this motion and I really think it's a slippery slope, just like calling Quebec a nation is.

Mr. Yakabuski: I'm pleased to speak on our leader John Tory's opposition day motion today with regard to bail and the way it is handled here in Ontario, and the alarm that people have when they read a news story such as the one I'm going to be talking about here, which has some corrections here:

"Suspects in the slayings of Shao-Feng Liang, 38, Yasmin Ashareh, 20, and Seema Badhan, 19, were under court orders at the time of the deaths. Information under a photograph of the women in Tuesday's paper described the suspects' status incorrectly. The Star regrets the error.

"Eleven were out on bail.

"Nine were banned from having a firearm.

"Eight were on probation.

"Of the 32 people charged in a Toronto murder this year, 21 were under a court order, some multiple orders." We can come back to that a little later.

When people read about these cases, or another one where youths charged with beating a man into a coma were out on the street the very next day—eyewitnesses, tape, video, the whole bit—when reasonable people in the province of Ontario read stories like that, they ask themselves, "How does that possibly happen?" You see, they're not lawyers. They're not constitutional experts. They have no way of ciphering out the complexity of laws and legal matters, but they ask themselves, from a human, common sense perspective, "How can people be out on the streets, in many cases the day of, sometimes the day after, committing a violent crime, many of them where guns or weapons of another nature were involved?"

Our leader, John Tory, in bringing this motion with regard to bail, is not snatching that out of the air somewhere or bringing this out of a vacuum. We're responding to what people are saying is a real problem in our system. They want to know why violent offenders like that are simply let out onto the street. We've got statistics here as well—not statistics; anecdotal evidence, mostly from police officers and such, where they have informed us that in so many cases, a person who commits a crime was the very person who had been granted bail just days, weeks or whatever before. Also, people were on a crime case here in London, I believe it was, where a guy disappeared while he was out on bail and now they're out looking for him. It was a crime of murder, or a charge of murder, not convicted as of yet.

People are asking themselves, how does this happen? So what we're asking the government is that we need

some more information on this. Do you know what? They don't even keep statistics. They can't even tell us how many people get bail, how many people don't get bail, because it's not important enough to them to keep those kinds of statistics. Well, you would think that it would matter, but as my leader said, it's more important for them to keep track of how many people call the 1-800 number to talk to a bear. Actually, they don't talk to a bear; they talk to the "bear wise" hotline. But they might as well be talking to a bear.

1710

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): What kind of bear?

Mr. Yakabuski: A black bear. They've got all those statistics—bears over bail. This is the priority listing of the government of Ontario: bears over bail. Actually, it's just the bear telephone over bail. This is why our leader is saying, "How do you know how well a system is working, or not working, if you don't even track the statistics?" That's a fair question. If you don't keep track of the data and actually know what you're doing and what is happening, how can you fairly analyze and evaluate whether or not a system is being operated successfully or unsuccessfully?

I listened to the member from Scarborough—Rouge River talking earlier about all the things this government is doing to deal with social issues that, from his perspective, are the reasons people fall into maybe not a life, but a lifestyle, of crime. It's an easy argument to make, because it's always easy to put the blame on some other situation or whatever. I know that's always one they fall back on and say, "If only the world was perfect." If the world was perfect, we couldn't have any crime. But the fact is we don't live in a perfect world and we do have crime, and we have to have a proper way of dealing with it.

So when people do commit crimes, we have to have a system that ensures that the public is protected. And when bail is treated as willy-nilly as it seems to be under this government, then is the public safety being given top priority? Good question, I think. When you read these stories in the newspaper about people on bail who were before the courts just days before, people have a very genuine reason to be concerned: "Second Gang-Related Release on Bail Sparks Concern; Police and Crown Cite Fears for Public Safety; Judge Defends Role as Protector of Civil Liberties." We're concerned about the civil liberties of someone who has been charged with a serious, violent crime, but we're not concerned about the public safety of people who are innocent. They have not committed any crime, nor have they been charged with any crime.

Now, I know we live in a system where we have the presumption of innocence, and thank goodness we do. But at the same time, when somebody has been a multiple offender, they've been before the courts more than once, the evidence is very strong—they may even have eye-witness accounts; they may even have video tape accounts—I think a reasonable person has to ask

themselves, "Are we protecting the public if we're allowing that kind of offender to simply go free, based on the system we've got?"

There are all kinds of concerns about surety and whether we're even collecting that for people who have skipped bail. We aren't even able to track whether we've got that money. So not only do we let them go; the person who has given surety doesn't have to pay the bail amount.

I guess what it comes down to is confidence in and perception of the system we have. The public's perception is extremely important. If they don't believe that we're operating in a criminal system that protects the public and places their safety at the top of the priority list, then their confidence leads to all kinds of changes in society. If you don't feel that you live in a system where the public is properly protected, do you conduct yourself in the same sure way and do you carry on your normal activities with the kind of confidence and freedom that you can walk your streets in any town, village or city in this province and be safe? Well, no, you don't. It changes the way you feel about it. It changes where you go. It changes the hours of the day that you may conduct certain activities or even go out for a walk, because you lose confidence that the neighbourhood you live in, the neighbourhood you frequent or the business portion of a particular community—that your safety is actually, for the most part, assured. I don't want to be naive, because nowhere but in a perfect world can you be absolutely certain of just about anything, but when you see this kind of stuff going on, that reduces your confidence that you live in a safe environment.

I think it is very important. If you're going to have a successful society and a successful economy so that people can put all of their efforts into a positive force, you have to have that confidence that you can walk safely. When you have a bail system that is clearly not working, I think that has to come into question.

Mr. Kormos: I want to be very clear right upfront that I will be voting for this resolution and I'm going to use the modest amount of time allowed to me here today to explain to you why.

I want to indicate that I have the highest regard for crown attorneys in this province. Although it's been many years now, I was blessed with the opportunity to work with some very competent, talented, experienced crown attorneys, people like Allan Root down in Niagara. I've also been blessed to appear before what is one of the world's greatest benches, one of the world's best judiciaries—best trained, most professional and certainly hardest working.

I believe very much in the presumption of innocence. Unlike others, you will not hear me denigrating presumption of innocence or charter rights when they apply to people charged with crimes as compared to when they apply to other people. The fact is you have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms because it applies to everybody. Lord knows, we've had far too many unjust convictions in this province and in this country for us to start abandoning due process now.

Let me talk about due process. I've heard from this Attorney General his denigration of process. It's part of his attack on the existing Ontario Human Rights Commission. He says it's obsessed with process. Well, that's code talk from libertarian types who want to see efficiencies at the expense of process and people's rights. Surely the only thing more tragic than a dangerous and guilty criminal being freed is an innocent person being found guilty and sent to jail. I believe that with all my heart. And I believe that our system of law, while worthy of a whole lot more investment, is probably the one most capable in the world of avoiding that tragedy of an innocent person being convicted.

1720

But let's understand something out there: People aren't interested in hearing statistics about reductions in the amount of crime, because that makes little sense and is of little comfort to the mother of a kid who's slain. To talk about break and enters being reduced by 15% is of little comfort to the senior citizen who comes home and finds her house or apartment ransacked and things like baby pictures, which can't be replaced because there are no negatives anymore, either mutilated and defaced or simply stolen.

I appreciate that the language here is "violent crime." I consider break and enters into people's houses to be a violent crime, especially when it's senior citizens who are the victims. The sense of fear they live out their final years with is profound and real: that violation of security, knowing that somebody has been in your home taking things that are yours and, more often than not, vandalizing or mutilating or defacing either your property or your home. It generates consequences for the victim that most people fail to comprehend. At the same time, let's understand, break and enter of a dwelling house is one of the most serious crimes in the Criminal Code. It carries with it a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Let's take a look at the resolution, phrase by phrase.

"An alarming number of murders and other violent crimes are alleged to be committed by people who are out on bail...." I think that's a given. It shocks Ontarians, it shocks and offends Canadians to learn that somebody who has already been charged with an offence is released on bail, on terms and conditions, and then commits another; or arrested and released twice and then commits another—or thrice.

"That, in the opinion of this House, the government should seek a review of all orders granting bail for charges involving violent crimes" is, in and of itself, not an offensive proposition. Why shouldn't there be a review? Of course they're talking about appeals. Why shouldn't there be? Why shouldn't there be when we're talking about serious and violent crimes? What we're talking about is people who kill other people, who attack and mutilate other people, who rape innocent victims. That's who we're talking about. If there has been a release order, why shouldn't there be a review in the interest of public safety? The appellate court—it used to be the county court that conducted these reviews, but

now I suppose it's the Superior Court of Justice; is that correct, Ms. Elliott?—may well uphold the release order. But I say that the public interest has been served, because if there was any error, it was on the side of caution.

"That, in the opinion of this House, the issue of crimes alleged to be committed by people already out on bail is of increasing concern...." Yeah. I mean, no spit, Sherlock. You don't gotta be a rocket scientist to figure that one out. Talk to your neighbours. Talk to the folks at the Legion. This weekend when you're at a church supper or at a Santa Claus parade—you big-city Toronto people don't get to go to Santa Claus parades; Ms. Elliott and I do because we're from small-town Ontario. I was down at the Santa Claus parade in Thorold last weekend, and in two weeks' time we'll be down in Pelham. I'll inevitably be there with Tim Hudak; I'm pretty sure of that. Talk to the folks at the Santa Claus parade.

The issue of data, I think, is incredibly important. I have been increasingly frustrated in attempting to get hard numbers from the Ministry of the Attorney General. It seems to me the systems just aren't in place to collect and record the data that are of great interest to all of us for any number of reasons. I have no interest in judge-bashing, because supervision of judges is not by this Legislature; it's by courts of appeal. Again, in this province, the Ontario Court of Appeal serves us well and is one of the most highly regarded courts, not just in Canada but internationally.

If there was any hesitation I would have in supporting the resolution, it was the second paragraph: "...the government should adopt a policy to direct crown attorneys to oppose the making of all orders for bail for violent crimes." I think, though, clearly, that has to be understood in context. Is that such an unacceptable proposition when in fact there has been a violent crime and when there is strong evidence against the perpetrator? You see, one of the things a bail court considers is the likelihood of conviction, the weight of the evidence, however difficult it is for a judicial authority, a judicial authority who may have to concede that there isn't a great deal of evidence, who may well have to sit down with a crown attorney and defence counsel to talk about ways of addressing it, because the absence of evidence doesn't necessarily mean, of course, that the person is innocent; it merely means that there's a less than reasonable likelihood of them being found guilty.

Let's understand what one of the roles of crown attorneys is in this province. I don't envy the crowns. Crowns and judges have to be incredibly courageous people. They can't let public opinion sway them. Their job is to apply the law. End of story. One of the functions of a good crown—I've known many of them and most of them are—is to have to, however reluctantly, when he or she assesses the evidence, not prosecute a particular case. They may in their hearts know that somebody is guilty of an offence, even a very serious one.

What's the test, Mr. Zimmer? Reasonable likelihood of conviction, huh? So let's understand that well-trained and experienced crown attorneys in this province already

exercise significant discretion in whether or not a charge is to be proceeded with. By and large, if there's not a reasonable likelihood of conviction, the crown's policy manual says that the crown should, I suppose, either look for a plea bargain to a lesser offence, which again the public gets horribly confused about from time to time, or simply say he or she is not going to be prosecuted, and then they're scot-free. They walk.

So understand what this resolution says by implication. What it says is that you have to have more judges in this province and more courtrooms so that trials can be conducted in a speedy manner, because 17 years later the risk of charges, even in serious offences, being dropped because of delay in prosecution is omnipresent across this province because of a shortage of judges, crown attorneys and court resources.

Let's understand as well that there is what some have explained—journalists—to be a tactic by criminals and their lawyers to do more dead time in the local lock-up, especially here in Toronto, Metro east and Metro west, so that they get two-for-one and three-for-one trade-offs when it comes time to being sentenced. That means they can avoid pen time or end up with a sentence of about a few months, which, by the time you get to start serving it, turns into one third of that sentence for most cases, when your first eligibility for parole happens.

This resolution is all about getting serious about protecting Ontarians from criminals, and I approach this resolution, as I say, with a strong commitment to due process, a strong commitment to judicial discretion and a strong commitment and support for the discretion that crown attorneys have to courageously exercise. But do you know the plea bargain that may flow when a crown attorney realizes he or she doesn't have enough evidence to convict on a charge that was originally laid? Its companion is the efficiency plea bargain. While the plea bargain by a crown attorney who knows that he or she can't get a conviction because there isn't enough evidence on a particular charge and then will agree to accept a plea to a lesser charge—that crown attorney is performing a much more noble role than the crown attorney who is told to meet stats. They have to clear X number of cases a month. There is incredible pressure on crowns' offices to clear those cases, and that means efficiency plea bargains, not because there's no evidence but because there are backlogs in the court.

1730

I say to you that the Attorney General sure as heck hasn't kept data around those, has he? And that would be most interesting, wouldn't it? Let's understand this: But for the most serious charges, those where light imprisonment is imposed, criminals get out of jail, from the point of view of the victim, inevitably sooner rather than later, but at some point or another they get out of jail.

We in this province have taken the corrections out of Corrections. Our federal prisons are just out of control, that's clear, but our provincial reformatories have been gutted of corrections. I visit them reasonably often, and wherever I go I see machine shops shut down, I see work

training shops shut down, I see the agricultural access that some of them have shut down because those facilities simply have been shut down themselves. Those rare opportunities that the state has to intervene in somebody's life and make a meaningful difference in his or her life and maybe engage in some kind of rehabilitation—because it doesn't happen like that; there has to be investment in it—are absent from our correctional system.

We can't ignore the epidemic of violent shootings with illegal handguns that is taking place, not just in Toronto—because if it's taking place in Toronto, you can be sure it's taking place in every other part of Ontario. What we learned from the chiefs of police when they were here is that the guns and gangs project in Toronto has effectively spread the guns and gangs outside of Toronto, along the 401 corridor and up into northern Ontario, where you've got drug trafficking and gun peddling going hand in hand.

It is up to the federal Parliament to enact changes to the Criminal Code; I understand that. It's up to the provincial government, through its Attorney General, to adopt policies regarding how it approaches prosecutions. It's also up to the provincial government to adequately resource our provincial criminal justice system, everything from the beginning, with cops, through to correctional officers in public correctional facilities.

The Bill 14 that purportedly reforms justices of the peace appointments will not protect us from political hacks being appointed. We discussed that at length, didn't we, Mr. Zimmer, in committee? The Attorney General already had the capacity to appoint high-quality people. It's just that they—I'll put that in the plural—were often disinclined to because it meant a little political favour to a political friend who is so ill-suited to the task. Did Bob Rae engage in political patronage? You bet your boots. He appointed more Liberals than any prior or subsequent Liberal government has. It's true.

We should have some serious concern about how the government has approached Bill 14. It says, "Oh, we have to wait until Bill 14 gets enacted." I'm confident that when you have JPs sitting in a court with tired court staff, with tired provincial prosecutors, with fatigued crown attorneys, who get piles of files first thing in the morning like this, who don't have time to adequately prepare, when you've got JPs who are trying to speed things up and move things along who don't have time to hear, and end up not hearing, all the evidence, it's my view that that very climate results in regrettable, unfortunate and very dangerous errors in judgment, even by the best-meaning of judicial authorities.

In this province, people should be able to live without fear of being victimized, especially by crime against the person or crime against the home. Oh, I suppose from time to time somebody's going to steal the radio—no, they won't steal the radio out of my 12-year-old Chevy pickup, but if you're driving some new BMW or Porsche, I suppose from time to time somebody's going to steal a radio, and those things happen. But surely people in this

province should be able to walk home from the theatre or the movie or the shopping plaza or the corner store without fear of being shot down. Surely people in this province deserve to be able to come home to their own homes without fear of seeing them vandalized and trashed by break-and-enter artists.

Mr. Zimmer: I'm pleased to speak on this. I speak on this from many perspectives. In a previous life, I was a crown attorney for a number of years. I did some long slogging in the bail courts and the other courts, so I have a sense of what I'm speaking about.

The motion is essentially a debate between what we can do to get tough on crime and our respect for an independent judicial system. My colleagues on this side of the House have laid before this assembly just what our government is doing in terms of getting tough on crime, and I'm proud of that record. But let me speak to this motion and what I feel its effect is on our independent judicial system.

Our independent judicial system is essentially based on our constitutional arrangements. We have an executive, we have a legislative authority, and we have a judicial authority. Those three bodies—the legislative, the executive and the judicial—operate in a certain tension, independent of each other. The motion that we've heard today is a not-too-subtle—in fact, it's dramatically less than subtle—attempt to, in many ways, bring a subtle form of pressure—I would argue, a form of intimidation—on the judicial branch of our government.

How does it do that? It starts off very innocuously and it says that the motion contemplates giving instructions to crown attorneys on what to do, instructions to justices of the peace on what to do, instructions to judges on what to do and so on. You have to ask yourself, what is the effect of a judicial system—judges, justices of the peace or crown attorneys—being given (a) instructions on what to do and then (b) devising a system to keep track of their statistics on what they do or don't do in terms of the instructions? When you take this idea of instructions, plus we're going to track what you're doing in terms of those instructions—we're just keeping statistics, the motion says—that is a form of subtle pressure. Depending on the recipient, it's a form of more-than-subtle pressure.

We've looked at this issue of keeping statistics before in this Legislature. What is the Conservative record on this issue? Let me tell you.

Year 2000, Conservative MPP Marilyn Mushinski, Bill 68, Judicial Accountability Act: That was a private member's bill. It was an attempt to provide a regime whereby an annual report card or statistics would be kept and publicized on judges, crown attorneys, justices of the peace. It was a blatant attempt to intimidate the judicial side of our constitutional arrangement. What happened was that the Attorney General of the day, Jim Flaherty, was, in my view, publicly embarrassed by Mr. Justice Roy McMurtry, the Chief Justice of Ontario. Interestingly, Mr. Justice McMurtry was a former Ontario Attorney General, a former distinguished member of the

Conservative Party and indeed a leadership candidate before he went on to assume the role of chief justice. After some comment by Chief Justice McMurtry, the Conservatives backed away from that private member's bill.

1740

That private member's bill is sort of the same thing that we have in this opposition day motion brought by the Leader of the Opposition today: an attempt to not so subtly influence the judicial performance here in Ontario. How do we know that's really the intent behind this opposition day motion? I can tell you that on December 7, 2005, Mr. Runciman issued a news release saying that he felt the judges and JPs had to be held accountable. He attacked "putting judicial independence ahead of everything else." In my submission, judicial independence should be ahead of everything else. That's what our system is predicated upon.

In any event, going back to the Judicial Accountability Act, "Judge McMurtry challenged that government's decision to allow a private member's bill calling for the tracking of individual judges' sentencing records to proceed through the legislative process. The Chief Justice said the bill, introduced by Tory backbencher Marilyn Mushinski, was perceived as 'a rather heavy-handed and irresponsible attempt to intimidate judges in the sentencing process. All I can do,' he added, 'is express the hope that that was not the intention despite the perception and ... hope that the members of the Legislature would have the good sense not to proceed with such legislation.' Responding to Justice McMurtry's comments, Mr. Flaherty"—the day following those remarks—"acknowledged that the legislation would 'not go any further' because of concerns that it would interfere with judicial independence. The minister also confirmed that the government would not support a second private member's bill ... that would give the Legislature final approval over the appointment of provincial court judges and justices of the peace."

He did that for the reason that he recognized the validity of Justice McMurtry's concerns that that type of legislation—it's the same kind of legislation, the same kind of thought process that's reflected in this Tory opposition motion—is a threat to our judicial independence.

Today, when John Tory was speaking—I pulled up a copy of the instant Hansard for today, Tuesday, November 28, toward the end of his remarks, and I want to put this on the record, because I think this goes to the heart of the real intention of the motion, he said, "Not only is the court system ready for a close-up, I would argue the court system needs a close-up, and it needs a close-up so that people will know what's going on, so that they can keep an eye on it.... They"—that is, the people—"are the custodians of the right to enforce those laws, hand out sentences and"—this is critical—"approve or not approve deals that are made."

Can you put yourself in the position of a crown attorney or a judge or a justice of the peace who's now faced with an instruction from this Legislature that statistics are going to be kept on what they're doing in terms

of bail, convictions, sentencing—all of those things—and the purpose of those statistics is so that the people, speaking through this Legislature, can “approve or not approve deals that are made.” Put yourself in the mind of a judge or justice of the peace and ask yourself: Is that not an interference with that independent function? Will that not serve to act as a chill on the exercise of that judicial appointment?

Mr. Tory went on to pose the question, “How is this going to put a chill on judges?” if this motion successful. I say to you again, put yourself in the mind of a justice of the peace or a judge or a crown attorney. They’re keeping stats on what you’re doing in terms of sentencing, prosecutions and bail releases—all those sorts of things. Why are they doing it? They’re doing it so that the people, speaking through this Legislature, can approve or not approve of the deals that are made.

Once this Legislature politicizes the decisions that justices and judges and crown attorneys make, judicial independence is weakened; it’s under threat. I think the entire history of our western legal system is predicated on this idea that the judicial system be independent of the Legislature, that those decisions be made in good conscience by the judges and the crown attorneys and the justices of the peace. This motion, if approved, would weaken that independence.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The time set aside for this debate has expired.

Mr. Tory has moved that, in the opinion of this House, an alarming number of murders and other violent crimes are alleged to be committed by people who were out on bail for crimes previously alleged to be committed;

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should adopt a policy to direct crown attorneys to oppose the making of all orders for bail for violent crimes;

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should seek a review of all orders granting bail for charges involving violent crimes;

That, in the opinion of this House, the issue of crimes alleged to be committed by people already out on bail is of increasing concern to the people of Ontario;

That, in the opinion of this House, the lack of statistics relating to bail orders and court proceedings prevents the public from obtaining an accurate picture of the functioning of the justice system;

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should begin providing more detailed information about the justice system in order to ensure Ontarians have an accurate picture of whether the justice system is functioning well and in the best interests of public safety.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1747 to 1757.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Tory has moved opposition day motion number 4. All those in favour of the motion will please rise.

Ayes

Barrett, Toby
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Hardeman, Ernie
Hudak, Tim
Kormos, Peter
MacLeod, Lisa

Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Murdoch, Bill
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.

Scott, Laurie
Sterling, Norman W.
Tascona, Joseph N.
Tory, John
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakubski, John

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please rise.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Caplan, David
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat

Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Oraziotti, David
Parsons, Ernie
Patten, Richard
Peters, Steve

Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Racco, Mario G.
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 21; the nays are 44.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been put.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

COAL-FIRED GENERATING STATIONS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Energy. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. John Yakubski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I'm glad to have this opportunity to speak to this issue. I rescheduled this from last Tuesday because the Minister of Energy said, “I want to deal with this personally, so if you reschedule it to the following Tuesday, I'll ensure that I'm here.” So I'm looking forward to his response.

This issue arises out of the government's promise to close down the coal-fired generating stations by 2007 and then insisting that they made that promise not because they picked it out of a hat or something, but they relied on the expert advice, the best advice they could get, from experts in the field, ensuring that that could in fact be done.

Given the fact that they have flipped and flopped and flown and flipped and flopped again on the coal situation, we think this is a very important issue. The Premier is now saying that we're not going to be shutting down the coal plants until 2014, but he has refused to divulge the names of the people he relied on for that information.

When you're talking about an issue as important as the coal-fired shutdown, we're talking about billions and billions of dollars that have been resting on this issue in this economy.

But this is not a question about coal-fired generation anymore. This is a question of honesty and integrity and respect for Parliament. When this government ran in the election, it ran on about 230 promises. One of them was to not increase your taxes. Well, they promptly broke that one. But another one that they broke was the promise to respect MPPs and this House, and what this minister and this Premier have done now has just thrown water all over that promise, because they don't have enough respect not only to respect the MPPs in this House, but a solemn promise made to a committee of this House that the minister would reveal the names, a full list.

I'll read you the Hansard, Mr. Speaker. The minister replied to me, when I questioned him on September 26 of this year, "I'll provide you with the full list." I asked him about the names of the people who told him that this promise was doable. "I'll provide you with the full list."

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): How long is the list?

Mr. Yakabuski: Well, I don't know. I don't know how long the list is because I haven't got it, because nobody's got it, because, you know what? They don't have it either. They invented the whole thing.

But I want to get to the crux of the matter. This is about respect for the institution. Later tonight, we're going to be debating Bill 155, the referendum act, and part of the purpose of that is considerations of electoral reform, because we find that the public, for some reason, sometimes doesn't feel engaged in the business of this House or other Houses of Parliament and that they don't have respect for the members of these Houses. But you don't have to really ask yourself why, do you, when ministers of the crown will not even respect a solemn promise made to a committee of this House, a standing committee of the Legislature of the province of Ontario? It's shameful, and I'm saying that the integrity of that minister, the integrity of this Premier, is what is on the line tonight. Do you believe that what we do here is relevant, or do you just think it's all a show? When you make a promise to a standing committee of this Legislature that you will reveal those names, for God's sake, have you not the goodness and the honesty to abide by your own words? Can you not stand up and respect what you said yourself? It is just taking the institution we have and saying it's just like this Hansard. That's what it is. It's like this Hansard. That's the Hansard of that committee. Do you know what? If that's what this minister thinks of it, that's what it's worth.

I say to the people of Ontario that if ministers of the crown can run roughshod and trample over their own promises made to a committee of this Legislature, then why should we expect them to have any respect for us? If you want to get some respect, you've got to earn it. If you want to get the people to believe that what we're doing here is relevant, then respect the institution itself.

What this man has done is absolutely shameful. He should either answer the question or resign.

The Acting Speaker: The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy, the member for Oakville, now has an opportunity to respond.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I know why they call it the "late show" now, after that performance.

When it comes to coal-fired generation in Ontario, our government's position is consistent and very clear. We're committed to replacing coal as soon as possible, but not at the cost of reliability. No government in North America has done more to clear the air than the McGuinty government, and certainly not that government. No government has taken steps as bold as this government to replace coal with cleaner forms of generation, something the previous government was unable to do.

In June, we directed the OPA to develop a revised schedule for the replacement of coal-fired generation at the earliest practical time without compromising reliability. We've also directed the OPA to use cost-effective measures that reduce emissions, including greenhouse gases, from coal-fired generation in the interim.

Our government is working hard to end all coal-fired generation in the province of Ontario for good, for the good of our air, of the environment and of our health. In the past three years, we've made real progress on this issue. We've cut generation from coal plants by 17% and closed down the Lakeview generating station, the single largest polluter in the GTA.

We're moving in the right direction, unlike the previous government, when it comes to reducing emissions. Sulphur dioxide emissions are down 28%. Nitrogen oxide emissions are down 34%. Carbon dioxide emissions are down 15%. Mercury emissions are down 32%. Particulates have fallen by 28%. That's in stark contrast with the previous Tory government, which increased emissions from coal plants: sulphur dioxide up by 114%—who gave you advice on that one?—nitrogen oxide up by 25%; carbon dioxide, a 120% increase.

Cutting generation from our coal-fired plants has already taken the equivalent of 1.1 million cars off the road in Ontario. We all agree this is the right way to go; we're all eager to make it happen. But the job of our government is to balance this eagerness to end coal with the responsibility to maintain a reliable and affordable supply of electricity.

The decision to revise the timeline, I believe, is the right decision for the province of Ontario. The fact is that coal currently produces about a quarter of our electricity. To end coal-fired generation before adequate clean power alternatives come online simply wouldn't be wise. It would destabilize our electricity system and shake the economy.

That's why we have a balanced energy plan that's moving away from coal toward cleaner and more sustainable sources of generation like wind, hydro, biogas and nuclear. In just under three years, we've set the wheels in motion to bring just under 10,000 megawatts of cleaner, diversified generation online, and that's more than any other jurisdiction in North America. We've

taken steps to build a conservation culture and to ensure a sustainable and prosperous Ontario.

Make no mistake: We will close all of Ontario's coal-fired generation plants. This will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in our province by up to 30 megatonnes a year.

Interjection.

Mr. Flynn: The member talks about Mickey Mouse. I think we're talking about the previous government when we're doing that.

Just last month, the Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance upgraded the rating of Ontario's conservation—not downgraded it, like they did with the previous government. The standard offer contract? Here's what David Suzuki has to say—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Oh, David Suzuki.

1810

Mr. Flynn: It seems like the Conservative Party has something against David Suzuki. David Suzuki is one of the most famous, one of the Canadians who is most respected, and I know you don't respect him. What Mr. Suzuki said, whether you want to hear it or not, is that the "announcement will revolutionize the market for clean, renewable energy in North America and lay the groundwork for a healthier, brighter future." He didn't say that about the previous government; you can be sure of that.

Keith Stewart of the World Wildlife Fund of Canada also had positive things to say: "We love the idea. The small stuff adds up. This model should be taken right across America."

On top of that, we just announced Ontario's largest wind farm in Sault Ste. Marie, a 126-turbine, 189-megawatt Prince wind farm. Robert Hornung, president of Canadian Wind Energy—you asked for experts—said, "We congratulate the Ontario government for the action it has taken to facilitate the installation of almost 400 megawatts." Nobody ever said that about the previous government, for good reason.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It's now time for the late, late show. The member for Simcoe North has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. The member for Simcoe North has five minutes to make his presentation.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Following the comedy from Yuk Yuk's over here from the member for Oakville, it's hard to get up and actually talk about a community safety issue now, after I've listened to that.

I brought this up because, quite simply, we put five order paper questions to the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services back in the month of June. And do you know what? They had 24 days from the September 25 date to provide those answers, answers such as "the total cost of the OPP presence required in Caledonia," "details of the security that has been provided for the Hydro One transformer station in Caledonia," "divulge the protocol that is in place between the

OPP and the Six Nations Police force," "provide the average caseload of offenders per parole and probation officer in Ontario," and "provide the guidelines that were the basis for the allocations of funding for new police officers under the ... 1,000 Officers partnership program."

Would you believe it? Last week we got a Mickey Mouse, typical Monte Kwinter answer where he doesn't answer anything. He hasn't answered a question in this House since he became the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. And what does he do? Of course, he's not here tonight. He's probably out on a helicopter ride somewhere—

The Acting Speaker: I caution the member not to make reference to the absence of any other member of the House and to make reference to ministers by the name of their ministry, to members by the name of their riding.

Mr. Dunlop: I'm very, very sorry that I referred to his absence. But I can tell you that this is a man who likes to pretend he's a wonderful Minister of Community Safety but won't answer questions. When does he want to provide the answers? On or about December 15, the day after this House is scheduled to adjourn. I can't believe a more gutless attempt to muzzle this Parliament. It's almost worse than Bill 107. What are we speaking about? We're talking about Ontario's taxpayers, the money that they're spending at Caledonia. Literally tens of millions of dollars have been spend there now. We're now into nine months. I think today or tomorrow is actually nine months we've been there, and we have seen nothing.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): What would you do?

Mr. Dunlop: Well, I'll tell you one thing that I would do: I would show more leadership. I would at least go to Caledonia. Would the minister not go to Caledonia? Would the Premier not go there? No; what they've done is they've let the OPP be the meat in the sandwich on this issue. They have been the meat in the sandwich. The OPP have taken the brunt of the problems there, and Monte Kwinter has completely ignored it. I've been there about three times, by the way. I have been to Caledonia. I've talked to the officers. They feel like meat in the sandwich.

We have already lost most of the upper echelon of the OPP. The one constant person who remains at Caledonia, or whose presence should be there, is the Minister of Community Safety, and he hasn't got the courage to answer those questions in this House. He said yesterday, "We tabled an answer." We haven't seen that answer. I want to know how come the Ontario Provincial Police have been the meat in the sandwich. I want to know how come we have not seen those costs associated with Caledonia presented to this House. I don't think that's an unfair request. Do you know that there are 124 officers there full-time? A hundred and twenty-four. Tens of thousands of hours of overtime are being paid to the Ontario Provincial Police: accommodation, food etc. We're going nowhere with this.

Oh, but I should remember, for a couple of days—remember, the Premier and the minister and a few people

went on a tirade against Stephen Harper and then all of a sudden they backed off on that? It wasn't Stephen Harper's fault anymore because, you know what? Eight of the 11 crime bills in the federal House of Parliament have been held up by the Liberal Party, and these guys right here—Dalton McGuinty, Monte Kwinter, these folks—won't show leadership and ask their federal Liberal cousins to pass that legislation. They won't allow that to happen. They want to muzzle Parliament there; they do not want crime bills passed, the same as tonight. They wouldn't support this resolution that made so much sense in this House. I cannot even believe that it happened. It's pathetic. We're trying to muzzle Parliament.

Interjection.

Mr. Dunlop: What's their idea? I think they're going to try to prorogue the House, that's what's going to happen, so that Mr. Kwinter will never have to answer those questions. But you know, these numbers should show up accurately in the final analysis of the budget next year. We'll probably never get an accurate picture of that before the election, but I can tell you that by that time it will likely be \$125 million or \$130 million out of the Ontario Provincial Police budget. That's what it will have cost. We've got no leadership shown here. I'm very sorry that—I know I can't refer to his absence tonight, but I hope he's enjoying those helicopter rides. He never got one with the city of Toronto police, but he's getting an opportunity now with the Ontario Provincial Police. Enjoy your helicopter ride, Mr. Kwinter.

The Acting Speaker: The parliamentary assistant to the minister, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, now has an opportunity to reply.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough—Rouge River): I just want to assure the member that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is committed to ensuring that, whenever possible, the information requested of the ministry will be provided in an expeditious and complete manner. I say this because our government believes and values transparency and integrity. We've chosen to conduct ourselves in such a manner.

We demonstrated this in June, when the member actually tabled two petitions—not five questions, as he says—and the minister has provided him with a response to that petition. To be truthful, and to correct the member's records, I understand the member tabled five questions in September, for which he is awaiting a subsequent response after being advised in accordance with the protocol under statutory requirements of our ministry of additional time in order to provide him with a complete—

Mr. McMeekin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Is there a requirement that there be at least one member of the opposition in their place to hear the question they wanted so desperately to ask as a late show?

The Acting Speaker: No points of order are permitted during these adjournment motions. I'll return to the member for Scarborough.

Mr. Balkissoon: As I was saying, I trust that the member can appreciate that there may be times when

information that is requested may take additional time due to a variety of reasons, such as the complexity of the information requested, including the fact that these are cross-divisional issues. The member is requesting to get specific data of expenses between a start point and an end point that are very specific, and that requires a lot of work. Additionally, some of the questions and responses may require the freedom-of-information and privacy implications, meaning the FOI coordinator will also need to review the response and any additional steps.

The minister answered the member's questions yesterday in the House with an appropriate answer. To be honest with you, he wants to know about Caledonia, but his question required specific answers. The minister has said in this House, the Premier has said in this House and Minister Ramsay has also said that it's in the ballpark of \$15 million. If he requires that accurate, precise information, we're prepared to present it to him. We've notified him at the appropriate time that we require an extension and that he will receive the information on or before December 15.

The ministry has followed the protocol. They have given the member an answer, and he will get his information come December 15, or before, if it's available. I would expect the member to understand that we're dealing with the ministry and the OPP. To get that information out and to verify that it's accurate—and it also could be made public—takes time. It's unfortunate that the member did not stay to listen to the answer, because his information, as far as I'm concerned—

The Acting Speaker: I have to caution the member not to make reference to the absence of any member of the House.

I'll let you conclude.

Mr. Balkissoon: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

I want to reiterate again: The member is complaining that he submitted his question in June. I would like to clarify the record. He submitted a petition in June. Did he receive an answer to that petition? Yes, he did. The member subsequently submitted five questions in September, and he did receive an interim answer 24 days later telling him that the questions that he had submitted to the ministry required complex research and information and we required additional time. We will provide him with that answer by December 15.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): Where is he?

Mr. Balkissoon: I'm not sure where he is, but he did raise the question and I'm trying to provide him with an answer.

Mr. Speaker, that's about all I can provide to you. I would have to say that I hope the member respects that the ministry is doing its utmost best to provide him the information. Our government is determined that we will operate a transparent and honest government.

The Acting Speaker: This House stands adjourned until 6:45 p.m., later on this evening.

The House adjourned at 1821.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
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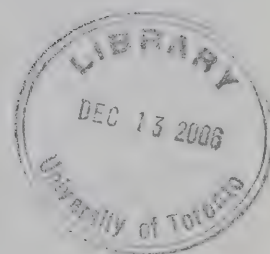
Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 28 November 2006

Mardi 28 novembre 2006



Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 28 November 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 28 novembre 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFERENDUM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE RÉFÉRENDUM RELATIF AU SYSTÈME ÉLECTORAL

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 20, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario's electoral system / Projet de loi 155, Loi prévoyant un référendum sur le système électoral de l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): It's a pleasure for me to participate in the debate tonight. It would be no surprise to the government, because my colleague Michael Prue has already spoken, that we will not be voting in favour of this legislation. We have some very serious concerns. They were very well and very clearly outlined by my colleague the critic, Mr. Prue, but I want to reinforce some of the concerns he raised when he spoke in his lead-off about the bill.

Frankly, the concerns he raised and that I'm going to reinforce really stem from the fact that there are provisions in this bill, Bill 155, which are significantly different from recommendations that were made about electoral reform by the select committee on electoral reform. That committee, an all-party committee, was established by this assembly and was given the mandate to look at electoral reform. It was also given a broader mandate in terms of putting in the report some of those other election procedures, voting procedures and parliamentary procedures that might be looked at.

The question I have for the government with respect to the report that was made by the select committee and the recommendations is, why weren't the recommendations of the committee adopted by this government, and why don't they find their way into this bill, with two small exceptions? The committee, made up of all members of the Legislature, all parties represented, voted unanimously on the 10 recommendations. I have to ask the government, what was the point of the committee's work if the government didn't accept the recommendations from that committee? I think that group, in a very non-partisan, impartial way, did some really good work. I give credit to

all the committee members, two of whom are now in cabinet. I regret, however, that the government didn't see fit to adopt the recommendations, particularly key recommendations around the percentage that is binding for a vote and the important issue of who sets the referendum question. The committee made some very important recommendations in this regard, and these have been totally disregarded by the government. The government has chosen to do something altogether different, which I think will have some very serious ramifications on whether or not there will be a referendum and what the outcome could be.

From my perspective, it's important just to read into the record what the committee had to say about electoral reform, because I think they took their job very seriously and recognized that any electoral change could have significant consequences or ramifications for those who are voting in that jurisdiction. The committee said this at the start of their report:

"The committee wishes to highlight the significance of electoral reform, given that the electoral system has a direct bearing on the party system, the balance of forces within Parliament, the prevailing mode of government (e.g., majority, minority or coalition), and the political engagement and representation of the public.... The committee concludes that,

"(a) electoral reform should not take place without due consideration of the long-standing political traditions that Ontarians appear to value, such as stable government, and the close identification of members with local geographical constituencies; and

"(b) electoral reform should not take place without due consideration of the probable effects on the party system, on the composition and functioning of government, and on the effectiveness of Parliament."

1850

One of the other mandates of the committee that I just want to put on the record dealt directly with the issue of the referendum, which of course Bill 155 deals with. The committee said as follows in its report: "The committee's mandate includes considering the process 'for the referendum to be held following a review of electoral reform by a citizen assembly ... and [it] may make recommendation on the requirements for a winning referendum.' Having heard from various experts in Ontario, and having consulted with electoral officials in a number of jurisdictions, the committee had several observations and recommendations." I will address those as I outline my concerns.

The first issue where the committee made a recommendation, and the government has chosen to do something altogether different, has to do with the setting of the referendum question itself. Subsection 3(1) of the bill states, "The referendum question, both in English and French, shall be established by an order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council." That means, in simple language, that it will be the cabinet of the day that will set the referendum question.

What did the select committee have to say about the important issue of who sets the referendum question, who has responsibility for setting that question? The select committee said the following in recommendation number 6: "Responsibility for the referendum question(s)—including the wording and the number of questions to be asked, and the number of referendums to be held—rests ultimately with the Legislature, acting on the advice of the citizens' assembly, the select committee on electoral reform and, if required, Elections Ontario."

So the committee was very clear that the responsibility for setting of the question rests with all of us, all members of the Legislature. We can act on the advice of the citizens' assembly when they bring forward their information and their recommendations. We should certainly incorporate what the select committee had to say, given the good work they did on this issue and, if necessary, take into account what Elections Ontario has to say in this regard. That was the recommendation.

The committee had this to say to support that recommendation on page 46 of their report:

"Responsibility for the Referendum Question

"In British Columbia's referendum, the question (Should British Columbia change to the BC-STV electoral system as recommended by the citizens' assembly on electoral reform? Yes/No) appears to have been drafted by the assembly and accepted by the government. In the press release accompanying the announcement of the second referendum, scheduled for 2008, the BC government notes that 'A referendum question will be crafted by the government and will be debated and voted upon in the Legislature.' While visiting the Electoral Commission Office in Scotland, the committee learned about guidelines that are used by the office to advise the government on the objectivity and neutrality of the wording of referendum questions." There's an appendix that outlines that process further.

What is clear is that the select committee made it very clear that responsibility for the referendum question should not be the government's, should not be cabinet's—in fact, had to be the responsibility of all members of the assembly, taking advice from other quarters into account.

Why? Because there's nothing impartial about the government setting the question. That becomes very partial, very partisan, and it needs to be a much broader group of people who participate in that if we are at all serious about having a question that people understand, that people will engage in in terms of debate, that will make sense for the changes that are proposed.

I find it very regrettable that on this important issue of who sets the question, who has that responsibility, the minister and the cabinet would decide that what the select committee had to say after all its deliberations was for naught, meant nothing, had no impact and no significance, and, instead, it will be the government itself who will make that very important decision. I think that taints the whole process from start to finish, if indeed there will be a referendum question. We don't know that, but this is what the bill sets in place, given what the citizens' assembly might say to us. But I don't see how people can have faith in a question that was not adopted by all members who have been sent here by representatives from the ridings that we represent, representatives who should have a say in determining what that question will be.

That's the first very serious concern I have.

Flowing from that is the next section in the bill, which says—this is subsection 3(2)—"The wording of the referendum question shall be clear, concise and impartial." The issue, again, relates back to recommendation 6, where clearly the committee says that the assembly should be dealing with this on the advice from other parties. If it's only the government, indeed only the cabinet that's setting the question, then it's only the cabinet that makes the final decision about whether or not that referendum question is clear, concise and impartial. There's nothing impartial about that at all. That is a very biased circumstance. I think that taints the process. I think it is unfair when any change in an electoral system will affect all members of the Legislature, not just the governing party, indeed not just the cabinet. There should be, there needs to be and there was recommended to be advice, input and participation by all members. That the government has chosen to ignore that is a question that the government has yet to answer: why they thought it was fit to do something different from what had been recommended by a committee of members of this assembly.

The next very serious issue has to deal with a decision threshold. This appears in section 4, entitled "Decision threshold":

"4. The result of the referendum is binding if the recommended electoral system is selected in,

"(a) at least 60 per cent of all the valid referendum ballots cast; and

"(b) more than 50 per cent of the valid referendum ballots cast in each of at least 64 electoral districts."

That's what the government has decided will be the threshold. That is quite contrary to the recommendation that was made by the select committee. Recommendation 4, on page 6 of the committee report, says the following, "The referendum should be binding upon a vote of 50% plus one, and the support of 50% plus one in at least two thirds (i.e., 71) of the ridings, or any other formula that ensures the result has support from northern, rural, and urban areas of the province." So it was very clear that after all their deliberations, after all their review of other political systems and how they work, the committee

unanimously adopted a recommendation that said the decision threshold had to be 50% plus one. I don't know where the minister or the government got 60% from and I don't know why they think 60% is legitimate.

Let me return again to what the committee had to say on this important matter. This is on page 45 of their report, under the title "Margin to Make Results Binding."

"In British Columbia, the referendum legislation stated that the vote was binding on the result of 60% (either yes or no), plus a simple majority (the same way yes or no) in 60% of the constituencies. The final result was 57.7% in favour of BC-STV, and a simple majority in favour of BC-STV in 77 of 79 constituencies. The BC referendum was thus not binding either way. Some have argued that it was therefore advisory, and provided a comfortable margin for the government to have moved forward with the proposal, if it had so wished," which the government did not.

"In New Zealand, the referendum that brought in MMP was binding on the result of a simple majority (50% plus one vote).

"Arguments for a supermajority (i.e., anything more than 50% plus one) tend largely to be about whether or not changing the electoral system is too important to be undertaken with the barest of margins. The committee heard of no other instance (other than in British Columbia) of an electoral reform referendum with a supermajority (i.e., not in Scotland, Wales, Italy, Ireland, etc.), and although most of the advice the committee received was for a simple majority (50% plus one), there were dissenting opinions. At the same time, the committee was unhappy contemplating a situation such as that in BC where there is a 'grey zone' where the result is fairly conclusive, but is not binding. Other possible conditions were discussed, such as requiring support in specific regions, or in rural versus urban ridings, or setting a threshold for voter turnout that would have to be crossed in order to validate the result."

After that is the committee recommendation: "The committee recommends" again "that the referendum be binding upon a vote of 50% plus one"—the two important references there are "binding" and the threshold of 50% plus one—"and the support of 50% plus one in at least two thirds (i.e., 71) of the ridings, or"—as the committee also decided—"any other formula that ensures the result has support from" across the province.

I would have thought, given the experience in British Columbia, that this government would absolutely have not used the threshold of 60%. It seemed to be the only jurisdiction the committee looked at where that had been used, and frankly the results in British Columbia were, as we have seen, very dismal indeed. It does make me wonder whether, if the government was not interested in electoral reform, it would move to a threshold that clearly was close in British Columbia, but not close enough to achieve electoral change and electoral reform change. Clearly, if the committee had looked at a number of jurisdictions and this had been in use in a number of

jurisdictions, then the government would have some ground to stand on.

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I remain very concerned and pose the question again: Why is it, in light of this very important recommendation made by the select committee representing all parties of this Legislature—a unanimous recommendation—that the government refuses to accept the wisdom of that committee after their deliberations and instead would move to a threshold that, as we have seen in British Columbia, was doomed to fail? It makes one wonder if we are not absolutely setting ourselves up for failure if the citizens' assembly recommends a referendum with the 60% threshold that appears in this bill; if we are not just setting ourselves up for failure in the same way British Columbia did.

I guess, if you're not interested in electoral reform, that's the way you go. If you are interested in electoral reform and in looking at what works in other jurisdictions and what will engage people to vote again in a way they are not engaged now, you would probably go with something different. Fifty per cent plus one recognizes, for example, how Newfoundland got into confederation and represents voting that has taken place in Quebec on a number of referendum issues. That is the threshold that has been used, and I see no good reason for the government to use something else, especially in light of the failure in BC and of what this House's own select committee recommended.

I also remain very concerned about public education. The committee had a really good recommendation around informing the public of the changes and ensuring that there was a party—not political party but an agency or organization—that would have responsibility for ensuring that the public was well aware of the changes that were required long before the referendum, so the public could make an informed decision about that referendum question. The committee said in its recommendation number 7, "Elections Ontario (or another appropriate and neutral body) should be charged with the responsibility for ensuring that every voter receives adequate information about the arguments for and against each side of any question that is put to the people. Elections Ontario (or another appropriate and neutral body) should also be asked at the earliest opportunity to prepare a plan for an effective, participatory, pro-active public education campaign, with an emphasis on enabling voters to participate in town hall meetings or other community forums."

I recognize that the bill is about setting in place a potential outcome, because we don't know what the outcome from the citizens' assembly is going to be. Having said that—I just read into the record what the committee has recommended around public education—I want to look at what the government has proposed in this regard. This is done in section 19, the regulation-making section.

Frankly, the government doesn't appoint Elections Ontario to be in charge of ensuring that every voter gets

adequate information about both sides—not Elections Ontario, not any other body. Elections Ontario is given the responsibility of “prohibiting any person or entity from organizing a campaign to promote a particular result in the referendum or advertising for that purpose unless the person or entity is registered with the Chief Election Officer...” So if you want to be on one side or the other, you register, as a lobbyist would, with the Chief Election Officer.

Secondly, the Chief Election Officer is responsible for dealing with applications, including registration, to make sure that whatever criteria are going to be set for registration are met.

Thirdly, the Chief Election Officer has to provide information to the public that relates to the registered referendum campaign organizers. So the only responsibility of Elections Ontario around information on one side or the other is to give the public information about who is registered on one side or the other, and then you go yourself and make your inquiries about what they have to say. That’s a far, far cry from what the select committee recommended, which was that Elections Ontario or another body be given the important task of making sure every voter had information, for and against, on the question—on the questions, if there were more than one—and that it was the responsibility of Elections Ontario to make sure that that organization got into the hands of all potential electors the necessary information about the changes proposed, for or against, so people could make a legitimate decision.

No doubt that costs money. One of the problems in British Columbia was that the government there did not allocate enough money for a good public education campaign to be undertaken. The government allocated about 25 cents when vote BC said about a dollar per voter would have been necessary to make sure that voters were clearly advised about the positions for and against and were clearly informed about their choices.

This bill is silent on any kind of funding that the government proposes if indeed there is going to be a referendum process. But more importantly, I think the bill negates the important recommendation that was made by the committee to have Elections Ontario or another organization truly responsible for a major public education campaign—town hall meetings etc.—that would give both the pro and the con with respect to the question. Again, one needs to ask the government why they didn’t take the recommendation of the committee seriously in this regard.

So I have serious concerns about the bill. I don’t know why the government didn’t accept all of the recommendations of the select committee. I am certainly opposed to the changes they are making that are different than the recommendations made by the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I wanted to use the limited time I have tonight to talk about the future instead of the past. We have the luxury in this House of

getting clippings from all over Ontario. I read a really nice article that I thought I would share with members in the House tonight. It was written in the Owen Sound Sun Times by Anita Droog. She is actually the citizens’ assembly member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. She’s the member from Bill Murdoch’s riding. She was born in Toronto but some of her childhood was spent in Holland. She worked in Canada in 1964 and now lives in Durham. She’s been married for 33 years and has two children, and they’re proud grandparents. She wrote a really nice article in the paper to kind of explain her role as a citizens’ assembly member, and I thought I would share that this evening. She wrote:

“I have driven past this wonderful building many times, but had never been inside to see what it’s all about. We as Ontarians should be proud of this beautiful building, its heritage and all that it stands for.

“We at the Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform were able to see this handsome monument after hours, as we were waiting to have dinner with the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, James K. Bartleman. During the dinner, he told us of the different kinds of electoral systems he has come across during his career.

“As you may know, our mandate is to assess Ontario’s electoral system, and others, and make a recommendation whether Ontario should retain its current system or adopt a different one.

“You might be asking, why do we need to look at our electoral system? And how do we get there?

“We at the assembly are starting this learning process from the ground up. We need to look at how well our system works and why our voter turnout is declining. We also need to see how the number of votes a party receives is reflected in the number of seats” that they earn.

I guess I wanted to share that with people tonight because I think these individuals are putting a lot of time and effort into the process that we think is very important. Our referendum legislation is an example, and clearly a practical way that we show the importance of our level of work.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It’s my pleasure to add some comments to the speech of the member from Nickel Belt this evening on Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario’s electoral system.

The member did a good job of talking about the select committee on electoral reform, which was an all-party committee that met a year and a half ago or so, and the recommendations that were made by that committee. She correctly points out that the threshold for a referendum which has been picked by the government is different than what was recommended by the select committee on electoral reform. This bill, Bill 155, is really about the rules for a referendum that would be held on October 4, 2007, after the Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform makes a recommendation on how we elect people to the Legislature here in Ontario. If they make a suggestion for a change—and I would suggest that people who are spending eight or nine months looking at electoral sys-

terms are likely to come up with a change—that sets the rules for the referendum, including the threshold.

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Another item that the member from Nickel Belt talked about was public education. She correctly points out that in BC, one of things they learned from the electoral reform process they went through was that they didn't allocate enough money to educate both sides of the question of whether you were in favour of their new system. The system they chose was a fairly complicated one called "single transferable vote," which really required quite a bit of education for people to make an informed decision. That's something the select committee on electoral reform here in Ontario pointed out needed to be addressed if we're going to deal with electoral reform here in Ontario.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I want to echo some of the comments made by my colleague the member from Nickel Belt. It's a bit of an odd process that we're into. First of all, the government is saying that all of the work these people are going to do in order to try to give us some recommendation as to what should be on the ballot question, come next election, is going to be for naught because they're going to set the bar so darn high that at the end of the day there's no chance that it's going to get passed. Even if you got 60% of the vote, it's got to pass 60% of the ridings in Ontario. It's really interesting that in Canada we allowed Newfoundland to join this great nation with 50% plus one, we allow Quebec to separate from Canada at 50% plus one, and then we turn around and we say in this particular instance we are going to set the bar so high that basically no change is possible.

This is a bit of a sham, and I think it's a real slap in the face of those people who have been set to do the work we have asked them to do when it comes to consulting with people of Ontario. You've got a lot of eager people, like people in my riding who have been appointed—Lise, who has done some really good work, cares about this issue passionately—and you're saying, "After you've done all this work, you've got this 60% bar that you've got to pass." In democracy we have a thing that's called 50% plus one. It seems to me that the government should at least live up to the same standard.

I want to get an opportunity a little later to speak to this more fully, and I look forward to that opportunity, but I want to say to the government quite clearly that we understand what this is. This is the government trying to tell Fair Vote Canada and others, "We're all for change, we're all for moving to PR, and we're going to set a process by which to do it." But the process is so limited in its final outcome because of what you set as the bar that it will be pretty darn hard to get anything done by way of a referendum.

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I want to respond quickly to the member from Nickel Belt and also the member from Timmins–James Bay. Of course, we all know that in this whole debate these numbers have a vested interest in terms of which group you're talking to.

If you're talking to the Green Party, of course, they want seats. They're anxious to see it maybe at 45%. Can you imagine 51% to separate from a country or 51% to change the whole way in which you democratically elect people?

I would refer some of the members to an article that was done by John Ibbitson, who talks about the history of this country. He talks about Meech Lake. Every single province had to sign off on a change in how we had our Constitution, a change in how we had a Senate arrangement, a change in how we had our representation with different things—every single province, 100%. So don't tell me that 51% is the most just and fair when you're changing the total structure of the operation of your country and you're saying one more person on this particular day, in that particular province, in that particular part of Ontario is the person who is going to make a difference. No, it's not decisive enough. I'll tell you, I was on that committee, and there was a lot of debate on that. Frankly, I went along with the majority but I suggested 55% would be a good figure to have, in that particular range. I'm not ashamed to say that. Our party is open. We share our views amongst each other. We have these kinds of discussions, and that's fine. But 51%: In other words, 50 people there, 50 people there and one person say, "We're going to decide the future." What a divisive arrangement you have in this particular province, this city, this country or what have you. I suggest to you, rethink that. Read the article, "So What Signals a Consensus?" by John Ibbitson.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the questions and comments. I'll return to the member from Nickel Belt.

Ms. Martel: I don't know when John Ibbitson became such an authority on electoral reform. He writes one article, and this is what the government clutches onto in terms of their defence.

Mr. Patten: I'm not the government.

Ms. Martel: Well, the government did. Your other colleagues the other day, when this was debated, clutched onto this argument about how John Ibbitson had written this article and said that 60% is a threshold, and shouldn't we listen to him. For goodness' sake, the select committee unanimously makes a recommendation of 50% plus one. You know what? I trust their judgement. They're elected members of Parliament. I think they've got more authority on electoral reform and elections than John Ibbitson does. I really regret that the government has failed to accept the recommendations of the select committee, after all the good work that was done, after the committee looked at other jurisdictions and saw that they used 50% plus one and after the committee saw the failure of 60% in BC.

You know what? We've got 103 people who the government has set up to do very good work, and they're going to do very good work. You know what's going to happen if they decide to have a referendum because they want change? That bar is going to be too high. We have set them up for failure, because the government has

chosen a bar that was too high in British Columbia and a bar that hasn't been used anywhere else.

I wonder why it is that the government has yet to tell the members of this assembly why they didn't think the work of that committee was good enough, why they didn't think the judgment of those committee members—honourable elected members in this assembly—was good enough for the government to accept in Bill 155. It's not just the issue of the threshold; it's also the important issue of who sets the question, because when cabinet sets the question, that is not impartial and that is not legitimate. That taints the process right from the start. It is most regrettable that the government is moving in that direction.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge):

Mr. Speaker, just before I start to speak to Bill 155, I want to advise you I'll be sharing my time with the member from Nipissing.

I'm very encouraged and excited about the debate that's been going on here in the Legislature, not only today but the earlier debate that went on. Early on in this mandate, my first mandate here, I had the opportunity to bring forward a private member's resolution at that time, as opposed to a bill, and it was on exactly this matter. As a matter of fact, it preceded by a short period of time Minister Bryant's introduction of legislation dealing with the establishment of a citizens' assembly and the like. The debate in that particular one-hour private members' time was interesting. All parties engaged in it. There were quite a number of members in the Legislature, which was very encouraging. It certainly showed that there was a tremendous amount of interest on all sides in the matter of electoral reform and how we might proceed in that regard. I think at that time, some of the folks felt that what I was bringing forward was a motion that was talking to proportional representation as an immediate outcome, as opposed to talking about a process that one might undertake and the reasons for that.

I want to speak a little bit about some of the important reasons why we're now into at least a third set of discussions here, plus the public engagement, which is the most important part. But this is our opportunity as well to have on the record, for the benefit of those watching, why we want to explore alternative electoral reforms and determine whether or not there is a better system, or if the system we have is as effective as we can have at this point and should continue.

We've had a lot of discussion around some of the issues, such as the gender balance in this place. We have talked a lot about the sparsity of female members of the Legislature, and those percentages really haven't changed very much, in spite of the population base. Time permitting, I'd certainly like to comment later on the assembly reform that might be required, how we do our work inside here, in addition to how we elect people. We've heard about that during the select committee process as well. But clearly, the public is interested; the experts we've heard from, the public we've heard from

are interested in ensuring that this place is better reflective of the community at large. One of those elements certainly is the male-female ratio within this place. There may be better mechanisms to achieve a more reflective balance of the community in that regard.

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I think a lot of the discussion has centred around the demographics of our province. We're not the province we were 50, 80, 100-plus years ago; we're a very different province. We've changed our attitudes in this province, in this country, in regard to the different makeup of our communities, and this place doesn't fully reflect that. We need to be cognizant of the opportunities the public have to explore means and mechanisms to make this place more broadly reflective of the community in which we live.

There's been lots of discussion during this process about the disengagement of young people in particular and how we create an environment for another generation of not only political interest but public interest in participating in the electoral process, both at the polls and within the system of selecting candidates, of working during the course of mandates on behalf of parties. That's all been part of this broader discussion around electoral reform. It's not just how we elect people; it's much more about how we engage the population of this province the next generation and the future generation in their community to ensure that democracy in the province remains strong.

Clearly, over the years, we're increasingly familiar with a diminishing voter turnout, whether it's at the federal level, the provincial level or, probably most starkly, at the municipal level. We've just come through a municipal election, and one only needs to look at the voter turnout in various jurisdictions throughout the province to recognize that fewer and fewer of our citizens are seeing relevance in exercising the franchise they have. They may still be interested in what's happening at town hall, but they're certainly far less interested in taking the time to go out and mark a ballot for their municipal councils or their school trustees. This discussion, this public discussion, should be as much about the engagement of communities, about involving young people in this process, about better reflecting the demographics, the change in our province, about better reflecting the gender balance in places like this, and maybe less so on some of the minutiae.

I had the opportunity just last Friday to have a young lady, a senior student at high school doing her OACs, preparing for next year, ideally to go off to the University of Ottawa and pursue political science and maybe law—and she's chosen to engage in this process as a student and through the citizens' assembly. She was interested in my views generally on the process. She was interested in what I thought would be the best outcome, and I respectfully declined to provide a definitive view in that regard, because that's what this process is about. But she was anxious in talking about having gone out to meet with some of her peers at the various schools and the

level of interest, or lack thereof, that they were taking. To me, it was quite encouraging that a young person at that age would take on this task and would want to go out and meet with her peers. In some cases, she was saying, in meeting with some of them at student councils, there was a tremendous amount of engagement and interest because they had already expressed some interest. In other venues, in a broader sense, her peers were saying, "So what's this all about?" We're probably missing the mark along the way in educating young people just to get them ready for their opportunity to vote.

I had the opportunity to participate on the select committee, and it was a rewarding experience. I had the opportunity to hear from a vast array of individuals and groups, those with academic and practical experience in governance models. I had the distinct opportunity, as one of the subset of that committee, to travel with peers on all sides to Europe. We visited Germany, Scotland and Ireland on a 10-day whirlwind tour there and back. During that time, I had the opportunity to talk not only about the electoral processes and configurations; we had the opportunity to talk about the work environment for legislative members.

Interestingly, as a side note, in Scotland they provide daycare within their assembly building, so that if young mothers, or not-so-young mothers as the case may be—or fathers, but primarily mothers—are elected to the assembly, they can bring their children and have them cared for, be able to work and see them during the day and do those things. While it's certainly the type of thing that encourages or provides a window of opportunity primarily for mothers to engage in the electoral process as candidates and as members, they structure their schedules so they finish their business day, for the most part, at what might be thought of as a more reasonable hour than we do here some evenings, being 9:30 or, on occasion, midnight. They finish their workday at 6 or 6:30, maybe 7 at the latest, and because of their physical environment, many people can make it home, but they can keep what might be considered a more real family life. So there is functional reform that we might consider outside this process within the context of this assembly.

As I say, I had the opportunity to share those experiences with some of my colleagues in those jurisdictions, each of them being different, each of them approaching governance differently, each of them selecting members of their Legislatures in a different way. The one thing I found of particular interest, though, was that every system had, at least in part, a first-past-the-post means of electing many of their members. Regardless of the variation that was chosen, there was a fundamental theme that was not unlike what we have here today.

I think what we're doing here is important. It's important because of all those other activities we're trying to achieve or the engagement we're trying to achieve. I'm hoping, as we finish this and the citizens' assembly in this process continues, that we will continue to encourage through this process the engagement of more and more of our constituents in the electoral process.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time, and I'd just say that I will share my time with my colleague from Nipissing.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the member for Nipissing.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I'm delighted to speak tonight to Bill 155. I had the privilege as well of sitting on the select committee on democratic renewal with some of my colleagues who have spoken here tonight, and it certainly was a learning experience. As a lawyer, as a former staffer here at Queen's Park, as someone who studied politics and as someone who has lived the political life through my family and now in my own adult life, it was an interesting exercise to see how people view the political system, the voting system.

We had deputations from a number of different groups who were trying to put forth their view of how the system should run and why. Different goals were expressed by different groups. Some, as my colleague stated, were looking for more representation for women, how to engage more people in voting, how to engage our younger people in voting for the first time. These were all interesting discussions that we had.

We also obviously discussed different forms of voting and different electoral systems that we see in Canada and around the world. I had the privilege of travelling with three of my colleagues out to Vancouver and Victoria, where we met with people who had served on the citizens' assembly there, and we studied first-hand the model that BC adopted.

The province of British Columbia went through an extensive exercise of consultation through their citizens' assembly and put together a referendum question that was voted on, as the member from Nickel Belt alluded to. We did take a great deal from our discussions with the members of the citizens' assembly, the people who ran the whole process, some of the elected officials who were involved in setting up the process, and I believe we have taken some of the best recommendations they had in that process and brought them forward here in Ontario in order to best serve our citizens as they choose how they wish to be governed in the future.

1930

What we're doing today through the citizens' assembly is setting out an exercise for all Ontarians to participate in a discussion on how we run our elections in the future. I think this is really an unprecedented exercise for the province and one that I'm hopeful citizens will engage in and participate in fully.

Tonight, in Nipissing and in Thunder Bay, our citizens' assembly members are meeting with citizens of Ontario. It's open to the public. In North Bay, our meeting is being held as we speak—yes, they're speaking now—from 7 to 10 at the Indian friendship centre.

Our discussion in Nipissing is being run by our citizens' assembly member, Rollie Gibeau. Rollie is a retired gentleman. He has lived in North Bay for 20 years. He has been married for 45 years. He is a former appraiser, with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.

for 30 years. He travelled around a bit in that job, settled in North Bay, and decided that he wanted to use his retirement time productively and came out when called for the assembly activity. Rollie also volunteers with PhoneBusters, and I had the privilege of actually running into him at the PhoneBusters celebration just 10 days ago and having a chat with him about his role on the citizens' assembly, how it was going, how engaged he felt in it. He did express to me some concern about the meeting tonight and getting enough people out, so we helped him out with that and made sure there was some press coverage on the fact that the meeting was being held. I'm happy to report that we had about 35 people there tonight, including some students from Nipissing University who are studying political science and including some media students from Canada College who are taping the proceedings for TVO. So we've engaged some young people in the exercise even at the local level, and I am hoping that the discussion will be fruitful tonight in Nipissing and that people will come away with much more information about the process and the different proposals that are being discussed.

The media is there as well tonight, which I am encouraged by, and hopefully there will be some good coverage so that those who weren't able to attend the meeting will hear about it and know about the exercise that we've undertaken and the input that the average citizen in Ontario can have in this process in determining how we're going to vote in the future.

Some comments have been made about the threshold that we have set for this vote. I was on the select committee that made the recommendations. We had a full and frank discussion, and I have to say that there were many views in committee on what threshold should be put on the vote. The member for Nickel Belt said that BC was the only jurisdiction to adopt the threshold that is set out in this legislation. In fact, that's not true; so did PEI. These are really the only two jurisdictions in the country that have undertaken an exercise in democratic renewal to the extent that we are doing here in the province of Ontario.

This could be a foundational shift for the province, should the citizens' assembly recommend a change in voting procedures. I think that in order to adopt any kind of change of that magnitude in our system, in our democratic process in the province, we need to make sure that a good majority of Ontarians support the decision. I don't think we're going to increase the engagement of our citizens in the province in the voting system if they don't endorse the changes that we want to bring in. So without a 60% threshold, we wouldn't have that strong endorsement from Ontarians for any kind of change.

The member for Nickel Belt also raised some of the concerns that we heard about the education process and people's engagement in the process once a recommendation has been made, or how they will be educated, moving towards a referendum. We heard a lot about that. The member from Beaches-East York was with me in Vancouver. We heard a lot from the citizens' assembly

about their frustration in the education process. In the regulations in Bill 155 we set out a process for educating, a neutral process for giving the information to Ontarians so that they can make an educated decision on whether they approve or not the recommendations of the citizens' assembly.

I want to just go back to some of the discussion by the member for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge about our students' involvement and our youth involvement. Through the process, the Ministry of Democratic Renewal has also engaged a youth assembly, and I think this is really an interesting idea that our government has embraced and set out for our youth. This wasn't tried in British Columbia. This is an idea that I think was homegrown.

Jessie Paul, from my riding, attended the citizens' assembly for our youth in Huntsville. Jessie goes to Nipissing Secondary School on the Nipissing First Nations reserve, which is in my riding. Unfortunately, Jessie and I haven't connected yet. I called him a couple of times. We haven't quite caught each other, but he left me a message asking me some questions heading into the assembly and I know he was very much engaged in the process.

I hope that all the students from the 103 ridings who attended the students' assembly will have had an opportunity to benefit from that and learn, as we did, about the different electoral systems that are available worldwide, the pros and cons of each, and determine what they think, as students, would be appropriate moving forward, because one of our many goals is to engage the youth of the province in voting, in the democratic process, in taking their social responsibilities seriously. So if we have youth across the province, as the member from Ajax discussed, who are engaging their fellow students in a discussion on electoral reform, I think we are going a long way to improving awareness among students of their democratic rights, of their obligations as we'd like to see them, and engaging them in future electoral reform but also in the electoral process in the future.

As I said, I was privileged to sit on the select committee. I think we did some very good work. I was delighted to hear the member for Nickel Belt talking about the good work of the members of the committee. I think it's the nicest thing she's said about me in a long time so I just wanted to note that for the record. I certainly had an exceptional time on the committee, hearing about the different systems that are in place and really how people feel that they reflect or don't reflect their reality and their presence in the province. I hope that through this legislation, through the citizens' assembly, through the engagement of 103 Ontarians who are really putting a lot of time and effort into this process, we will come to a place where we will be discussing again what is next for the future of Ontario, what Ontarians really want to see in an electoral process and how Ontarians feel we can engage our youth and more Ontarians and new Ontarians from all walks of life in the electoral process so they feel that they too are represented here in

this House on a daily basis. Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill this evening.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to rise this evening to speak to the comments of the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge on Bill 155, the referendum act.

I'm one of the people in this House who has a hard time looking at change in the future on how this House operates because I believe we've had a very stable system in the province of Ontario. I think that's one of the main reasons why something like 120,000 people per year come from out of the country and want to make Ontario their home. So I think we've done a lot of things that are really right. But if we're expecting the citizens' assembly to report back with some magical solution that's going to make all these people come out in droves to support politicians at the time of an election, I think we're making a big mistake.

The conduct that happens right here in this House, the conduct of the government, of the opposition and of the third party, for example, means a lot when people—we continually hear about the parliamentary language, the parliamentary decorum etc. that happens here, but above all I think it's the actions of the government. When you get a government that's breaking 50, 60 promises that they made in the previous election, how can that attract people to want to be excited about politics? How can it attract young people to want to get out there and vote? Just today, I put questions on the order paper, and five questions were unanswered. Five questions that were required by this Parliament to be answered by the minister were not answered. They were put off until after the House adjourned. If we improve those types of things, then I think we might be ready for some other changes. As far as I can see right now, we're just going down the Americanization of politics with our four-year term that we've set up.

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Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): First of all, I want to thank my colleague from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge and the member from Nipissing for speaking to this bill and explaining to the people of Ontario and to us about the process the bill went through, through the committee and through a group that went to many different places and many different countries to study it, to examine how we can reform our electoral act in Ontario.

I wasn't part of the team that was in charge of conducting the formation and structure of this bill, but I heard the member for Nipissing, who was a very active member on that committee. Apparently there were many different opinions about the threshold; it wasn't one set opinion. Therefore I don't know—I wasn't there, as I mentioned—but in the end, it's a very important step toward opening it up for the people of Ontario and to people who complain all the time about our system in Ontario. I want to tell you that I don't think this bill will favour one way against the others. It's opening it up for the people of Ontario, so that in October 2007 the people

of this province cast their ballots for or against one system.

Talking about the education system, as the member for Nipissing mentioned many different times, we opened it up to the students for the first time ever. Many students from across the province participated in that. I had a chance to meet one of them last Saturday in London—one of the active youth in Ontario. He told me about that experience. He was so impressed and he was so happy because we, the adults of Ontario, trusted him. We asked him to come and join us, and tell us what he thinks about elections in the province of Ontario. It's a very progressive idea, and therefore, I think, a good step in the right direction.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I was also part of the kickoff for this students' citizens' assembly.

I do object to the cost of this overall exercise. It was close to \$400,000 for 103 students. That's about 3,500 bucks per kid to go up to Deerhurst Resort: 103 for \$400,000 is over \$3,500 per kid to go up to Deerhurst Resort—a very, very nice resort. I've been able to afford to stay there one night.

Interjections

Mr. Sterling: Come on, guys. You are spending a fortune on this exercise. You set the threshold in this bill at 60%, so nothing's going to happen. You're going to spend I don't know how many millions of dollars—maybe \$10 million—on the actual citizens' assembly, and you've said in this bill, "We don't trust the decision you're going to reach," because you've set it at 60%.

This process which this government has entered into is a farce—it is a farce. It's expensive, the way you've chosen the citizens' assembly is not legitimate, and nobody is going to pay attention to this process as we go forward.

We need real reform to this place. Let's get down to it. Let's have the government start keeping its promises. Let's have the government start showing one scintilla of integrity, which they haven't shown to date.

Mr. Bisson: You should never rise to the bait of responding to another opposition party's comments, but the issue that we spent \$400,000 as somehow a terrible thing when it comes to trying to figure out what democracy is about and what we want to do to increase democracy is, I think, a bit thick. We have spent billions of dollars in the name of democracy on wars and different things, and we understood that was necessary at the times our country has faced it. When we spend \$400,000 on young people coming together in order to tell us what they think about democracy, that, I think, is money well spent.

As a New Democrat, I just want to say that I don't agree with the comments by the member of the Conservative Party. However, I agree with him on one point, and that is the whole issue of the 60%. Hopefully I'm going to get an opportunity later in debate to get into this in more detail, but if we don't trust our citizens by saying to them, "You have to get 60% plus one in order to change

our electoral system," I think it's selling them short. We allow people to choose governments by less than 50% because we know in this province, because of the first-past-the-post system, we elect governments at 38% of the vote and we say that's okay. We can give a majority to a government at 38% of the vote, but somehow or other we need to have 60% of the vote to be able to change our electoral system. We say to workers on the picket line, "When you vote to refuse or accept a collective agreement by way of the Ontario Labour Relations Act, you need 50% of the vote in order to decide to accept or reject that offer." That's good enough for the OLRB. Why isn't it good enough for the changing of the electoral system?

I remind people of our own history. Newfoundland joined our Confederation on a vote of the people of Newfoundland at that time of 50% plus one. If we had suggested 60%, Newfoundland would not be part of Canada and Canada would not be what it is today. I say to the government, shame on you for raising the bar to 60%.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Arthurs: I certainly want to thank the members from Simcoe North, London–Fanshawe, Lanark–Carleton and Timmins–James Bay for their comments with respect to both my and the member from Nipissing's time on this particular matter.

Let me start with how I find some of the discussion interesting, having done some of the travel and having been involved in the select committee. I'm sure that other members on all sides who participated in that may not share the same view, but had the same experience.

There was a question of stability. The system works because it's stable. When we were in Germany, it was the night of their national election. We actually arrived in time for their gathering. The really interesting part over the next few days was the discussion around who was going to be in control of the government. It wasn't about lack of stability, in spite of the fact that they have a coalition government. The big issue was the fact that they brought down the government; the government brought itself down. They normally have a very stable government in spite of coalitions, in spite of what in effect we always think of as a minority government, because they have structures in place where the coalitions establish their policies ahead of time and you know how the system is going to work. But it was a really interesting discussion when you think of minority governments and how they would come and go, but there, the big issue was the fact that the government brought itself down, not that there was any degree of real instability in the government.

The member from London–Fanshawe made reference to the variety of views, and it's true. There was a great variety of views from the select committee, and it was our job to provide advice. Our job was not to dictate to the government what they would do with that advice, but it was to provide advice, the best advice we reasonably

could as a committee, with all the various views for them to consider. And that's exactly what happened.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): I have been looking forward to participating in this debate on Bill 155, the Electoral System Referendum Act, 2006. Obviously, as the title suggests, we're debating legislation that would allow a referendum if what's referred to as the citizens' assembly recommends changes to our electoral system.

I feel we need to clarify at the most basic level what we mean when we use a term like "electoral system." A crude definition would be the method by which we elect our representatives. Many of us have heard arguments against the current single-member plurality system and the first-past-the-post system, as it's been commonly referred to. I'm sure for most of us during the last election, during nomination night, we heard these arguments again and again, in my case from the representatives of the various parties who were running in that last election.

Very simply, under our current system, the candidate with the most votes wins, period. It's fairly simple, something we are certainly used to in our democratic society. But opponents of the single-member plurality often point out that only three major countries in the world continue to use the system: the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. But let's not forget that this system is also used by all the provinces, the US states, and it's used in civic elections.

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Come January and February, I will be attending a very large number of meetings of farm organizations, and often at their annual meetings they do have elections for their president, their chair, their secretary, their delegates to broader provincial conventions. Basically, they vote, and whoever gets the most votes is the one who takes the office.

Often, states and provinces represent larger populations than many countries, meaning the single-member plurality, in my view, is not on its way out; it's widely used in so many elections of so many various kinds, as I've made reference to, throughout the western world.

Nevertheless, it is important, I feel, to figure out just what Dalton McGuinty has up his sleeve with respect to this particular legislation. Opponents of the single-member plurality argue that the present system distorts the relationship between the votes and the seats, which then creates policies unrepresentative of the wishes of the people. I've heard this referred to as electoral fraud.

I made reference to the election in 2003. I, for one, would have to agree that electoral fraud took place at that time. Many will recall, again, those television commercials where Dalton McGuinty is quoted as saying, "I will not raise your taxes." He got the votes. People voted for Dalton McGuinty, thinking they were voting for balanced budgets and no tax hikes. Very clearly, Dalton McGuinty has never seen a tax hike he didn't like. He and Finance Minister Sorbara literally tripped over each other to get

down to the wire trying to be the first tax-and-spend Liberal in that new government that came in in 2003.

The most common phrase I heard three years ago right after that election was very simply, "Hang on to your wallet." People didn't vote for tax increases, and that's what they got. The status quo did fail. That's something we're trying to rectify with legislation like we're debating this evening. The status quo did fail, because there's no mechanism in place to get Dalton McGuinty to tell the truth. I suspect he'll try it again next year, but this time people in Ontario will know better.

In Ontario we do see public cynicism and distrust of the political system, a system that many perceive is out of control. In my view, that has a lot more to do with the endless stream of broken promises by this McGuinty regime than the electoral system itself. I suggest that change lies there, not with a change in the present system.

I do have some recommendations on a more positive approach for enhancing democracy.

(1) Keep campaign promises. I feel that's a cardinal rule, not necessarily a revolutionary change to our system.

(2) No attack dog antics from our health minister, for example, or any other member of what at times is an out-of-control Liberal caucus.

Mr. Dunlop: The pit bull warrior.

Mr. Barrett: The pit bull warrior was just made mention of by my colleague.

(3) Don't choke off debate on human rights legislation.

(4) Let's turn question period into answer period. I do hear that now. That phrase is becoming part of the common lexicon.

And the big one: Keep promises.

Tonight we're debating whether or not we should have a referendum. Looking back at 2003, Dalton McGuinty promised to abide by the Taxpayer Protection Act. He promised that if he wanted to raise taxes, he would hold a referendum. I remind the members that we're debating legislation tonight with respect to the advisability of holding a referendum. Taxpayers voted for him on that caveat, that he would keep his word and keep taxes down, and if he was going to raise them—he signed off on the Taxpayer Protection Act—on that condition only, then he would hold a referendum.

Well, we know what happened. Dalton McGuinty T-boned Ontarians with the largest tax increase in the history of the province. That was done in his first year in power. He tried to increase taxes on food. Do you remember that one, Speaker? He continues to raise tobacco taxes, three times and counting. Over the last three years, we have seen a phenomenal increase in the illegal tobacco trade, the contraband trade in tobacco, much of it in my riding. I now have probably 300 illegal smoke shops within my riding. Just in the past two weeks, three new ones were created just outside of Hagersville, for any of you members here who are smoking illegal cigarettes.

They want to claw back the GST cut. He was opposed to cutting taxes for seniors. I think he may grudgingly accept the income tax splitting, but only because Dalton McGuinty knows he can't get away with increasing taxes on seniors.

So we have a Premier who promised a referendum before raising our taxes. It's fairly simple: Ontarians now know that they can't believe a word that he says. He'll promise anything to anybody if he thinks it will get him re-elected.

Interjections.

Mr. Barrett: It doesn't stop there, members opposite. Let's not forget when Dalton McGuinty took autistic kids to court so he could break his promise to increase funding.

Given the track record of this current regime, there's no doubt that public cynicism is high right now. The public should be outraged at the massive electoral fraud McGuinty committed in 2003 through his broken promise campaign.

Dalton McGuinty made his bed with all of the broken promises; now he has to lie in it. Just to clarify, he's essentially lying down in his bed breaking promises; he's not lying in his bed telling lies. I didn't mean to suggest that.

I've long believed that we need to modify our electoral system so that we can properly hold promise-breaking politicians to account. In March 2004, I introduced the Recall Act. It was a private member's bill, as some may remember. It would have provided Ontarians with the opportunity to fire their MPP if they were dissatisfied with his or her performance. If it had passed, the Recall Act would have amended the Election Act to establish a process by which members would be recalled. Under the bill, a qualified voter in a member's electoral district could apply to the Integrity Commissioner to approve the issuing of a recall petition with respect to that member on the ground of conduct unbecoming to a member. The Integrity Commissioner would have been required to hold a hearing within 60 days, unless he or she deemed that application to be frivolous. If the Integrity Commissioner determined that the member had, on the balance of probabilities, engaged in conduct unbecoming of a member, the commissioner would then approve the issuing of a recall petition and the chief electoral officer would have issued one in the member's own electoral district. Qualified voters in that district could then register as canvassers to collect signatures. If within a year the petition was returned and signed by 25% of the certified voters, the chief electoral officer could then organize a referendum, which would be required to pass by 50% plus one.

If the member was the Premier—and this legislation did account for the recall of the Premier in the province of Ontario—both the petition and the referendum would no longer be limited to the member's riding. It would require 25% of the province on the petition and 50% plus one on the referendum.

In 2003, the McGuinty Liberals supported the use of referenda via the Taxpayer Protection Act. In 2004, they

opposed the Recall Act and, in doing so, voted against improving our electoral system using referenda. They flipped in 2003, they flopped in 2004, and tonight they've flipped again. They once again support the use of referenda as a means, in their words, to improve the electoral system. These flip-flops form the root of what I see: the public cynicism, in particular in the last three years, with respect to not only this government but, by extension, with the electoral system itself.

Mr. Dunlop: They're cynical because of these guys.

Mr. Barrett: I think you're right, honourable member.

I was reading chapter 5 of the Liberal Party's 2003 broken promise manual. Of course, I'm talking about the democratic renewal portion of that platform. I read with interest when Dalton McGuinty said, "Public consultation on major legislation used to be automatic. Now it is the rare exception."

In the past week, we've seen the most callous of all Liberal broken promises. Despite assurances from Michael Bryant that consultation would continue, this McGuinty regime used closure to axe consultation on the human rights legislation. That's Bill 107. John Tory offered a reasonable compromise that would have allowed more public consultation on Bill 107 and still allow it to get to the House for a vote. It's reprehensible that McGuinty refused this offer.

Tonight, we're debating electoral reform, yet in his platform on electoral reform McGuinty promised to hold public consultations. That promise was broken by Bill 107. The way I see it, a government that breaks its promises has no legitimacy, and for that reason I call for adjournment of the debate on Bill 107.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Barrett has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it. Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2001 to 2031.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour will please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed will please rise and remain standing.

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 5; the nays are 32.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

I return to the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant, who has the floor.

Mr. Barrett: We continue debate on Bill 155, the referendum act. In my deliberations, I have discovered a number of other promises broken, beyond the commitment for more hearings on Bill 107, which triggered that recent vote.

Take a look at page 1 of chapter 5 of the McGuinty broken promise manual. McGuinty promised that his plan for electoral reform wouldn't cost taxpayers a penny. This raises some serious questions. One came up tonight: How much has the citizens' assembly cost so far? I know the member for Lanark-Carleton presented

us with some figures. How much will the referendum cost? How much has been allocated for future meetings of this citizens' assembly? I cannot accept the Dalton McGuinty indication that these items are free.

Mr. McGuinty also claims that the citizens' assembly is truly neutral, that it can choose not to recommend changes to our electoral system, if it so desires. But on page 2 of chapter 5 of the McGuinty broken promise manual, Dalton McGuinty has already promised to introduce Internet voting. Which is it? Will our referendum be on the Internet? Will it not? Could this be another broken promise?

On page 3, McGuinty promises not to have partisan ads. This is one of the newer McGuinty broken promises.

Laughter.

Mr. Barrett: I heard a chuckle over that one.

On page 8 of chapter 5 of the broken promise manual, we read, "We will require public hearings for all major legislation." This begs the question, was Bill 107 not a major piece of legislation? Or is this yet another broken promise?

I'm concerned over the cynical way Dalton McGuinty has dodged and ducked public consultation on 107. His own caucus recommended more public hearings. His Attorney General promised more public hearings. Taxpayers footed the bill for those advertisements. I know the advertisements for more public hearings were in my area newspapers, yet the McGuinty government reneged on those promises.

In question period, Premier McGuinty will not come clean on his broken promises on this matter, the matter of Bill 107, which just shows how eager one can be to silence dissenting opinion or to restrict input.

Quite honestly, if Dalton McGuinty is prepared to reduce this Ontario Legislature and public debate to a laughingstock, I don't see any reason to be here this evening. I therefore call for adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Barrett has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be another 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 2036 to 2106.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed will please rise and remain standing.

You may take your seats.

The Deputy Clerk: The ayes are 5; the nays are 30.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

I believe the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant still has the floor.

Mr. Barrett: Continuing on, I do want to thank everybody for coming out tonight. I am concerned, however, that this proposed legislation represents a one-way street

with respect to electoral reform. Over the years, our electoral system has evolved to meet challenges. If passed, this bill would authorize the government to hold a referendum on possible change to the electoral system, as we know. But what happens if we change the electoral system and we find out we've got a system that's worse off than where we were before? I feel we need a bit of a safety valve. We need to have an option—perhaps to have another referendum to revert back to the current system if people in Ontario deem that necessary.

So there may be a case for changing electoral systems. With the public cynicism that's out there due to not only broken promises but Liberal behaviour within this House, people might be unnecessarily biased against the current system. Prior to changing electoral systems, we need to change the way people behave in this House. That means no more saying and promising anything to be elected, that means restoring decorum to this Legislature, that means keeping election promises and, essentially, that means converting question period to answer period.

With regard to Bill 155, I do question the sincerity of the people opposite and in particular the Premier. On February 1, 1997, Mr. McGuinty said, "I'm not a big fan of referenda." A year later, on February 14, 1998, Dalton McGuinty showed no love for referenda. He said, "I have concerns and reservations about the kind of legislation that ties the hands of legislators, which effectively treats them as being incapable of making the right kinds of decisions." A month later, Dalton McGuinty said, "In principle, I don't like referendum legislation." He goes on to say, "When you've got legislators who are truly responsive to their constituents, you just don't need referendum legislation." Those are the words of Mr. McGuinty, yet now we have the Premier promising to hold a referendum. If Dalton McGuinty is now in favour of referenda, I consider that to be one of the most stunning policy reversals, perhaps, in the history of this particular Legislature. I don't believe he's going to go through with it. Again, we look at past history. Why would I want to believe that?

If I have more time, and I know we're going to wrap up this particular section of the debate, but I feel it's very important that we analyze possible outcomes of this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Bisson: If there ever was a time that demonstrates the need for electoral reform and changing how we do business in this House, then this is probably a good time for that, because what you have going on tonight is a situation where the government has decided to amend the human rights act in a way that is not only in keeping with what the opposition isn't opposed to—in other words, government is trying to make changes that the opposition is opposed to, and not only the opposition, but, quite frankly, most of the people who really know something about the Human Rights Commission. We have the human rights commissioner and the heads of various government agencies who are basically knowledgeable in this area all telling the government, "Don't do what you're about to do." They've decided to go forward,

because they feel they have a majority, with less than 50% of the popular vote.

I just say to the members across the way, it's somewhat appropriate that we are basically in the debate about electoral reform at the same time that the government is trying to force through changes by way of a majority, which they didn't get, with more than 50% of the vote.

Laughter.

Mr. Bisson: God, they're not even listening to the debate. If you listen to the laughter and chatter next door to me, about four seats over, they're not taking it seriously. I think it's rather sad.

There are plenty of citizens in this province who, like me and others in this House, believe that the democratic process of what we do in this place is important. But what they sometimes fail to see in this democratic process are the results that the majority of the people want to have as an end result. I think this bill in regard to the Human Rights Commission is one of those examples. It's rather sad that we find ourselves in this position. I say to the government across the way: You can't have it both ways. If you're serious about democratic reform, you have to act as if you're truly a government that believes in the principle. Clearly, you're not doing that with Human Rights Commission vote. That is why the Conservatives are doing what they are. I just say to you across the way, I think it's a shame and I think it reflects badly on the government.

Mrs. Jeffrey: I thought for just a nanosecond tonight I was going to be able to agree with the member from Timmins-James Bay. I thought he was going down the right route saying tonight that it was a perfect example of needing electoral reform, but then he went off on another tangent. I thought he was going to talk about democratic renewal, so I'm disappointed.

I guess it's unfortunate we're ending the debate tonight in this format. I'm so disappointed with some of the comments I've heard tonight—the member from Lanark-Carleton and the member from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant—the cynicism, the distrust, the feeling of telling the public that they're wasting their time and that they're not interested in the process.

Based on the kind of enthusiasm we've seen from our student assembly and from our residents around Ontario—we've seen that they're smart people who want to be involved; they're enthusiastic and they're prepared to put the necessary time in—I don't think anybody on the government side is threatened by their interest in this process and that they want to be involved. We are not predetermining the outcome. We're waiting to see what they say.

We know that they're doing their homework now, and they're in the middle of the process of asking the rest of Ontario how they feel about this. It's very important that we provide our support and not keep questioning and second-guessing what they're doing and questioning their motive or their intent. I don't think anybody there is doing it for the wrong reasons. They're very enthusiastic. They're putting the time in. We should appreciate that

and trust that they're going to be thoughtful and methodical in what they bring back to us. I have every faith that they're going to bring back a good decision based on the information that they've learned about this month.

Thank you for listening tonight. I hope the rest of Ontario has as much enthusiasm about this as I do.

Mr. Sterling: It's interesting to note that Judge George Thomson, who is heading up the citizens' assembly, has said specifically to the citizens' assembly, "Thou shalt not touch the institution of the Parliament of Ontario." So anything that goes on in this place tonight or in the past is not even going to be dealt with by the citizens' assembly. What is going on tonight in this assembly has nothing to do with the citizens' assembly that is assembled.

Second, I want to talk a little bit more about the financing of the students' assembly. The students' assembly was funded by \$200,000 from the minister for democratic renewal. Do you know where the other \$150,000 or \$160,000 that assembly has been given came from? The Trillium Foundation, out of the \$100 million communities are supposed to get across the province. The Trillium Foundation was not created to fund government initiatives. This is an Ontario government initiative, and the government has robbed the Trillium Foundation of \$150,000 to \$160,000 to support their government initiative. That money could have done a lot to help in my constituency. It could have helped some municipal libraries in small communities or it could have helped some recreation groups in my communities. If this minister wanted to go for this initiative, she should have funded all the money from her own budget and not robbed communities across Ontario from their fund for recreation and other uses in our own communities.

Mr. Patten: I have to comment again to my friend from Timmins-James Bay, who continues to propose this partisan line that, no matter what you say, 50% plus one is the God almighty benchmark for decision-making, which we all know is not true. We all know it is in the vested interest of his party to get more seats, or parties that have no seats, to propose something along those lines of 50% plus one.

I find it interesting that the member from Lanark-Carleton talked about using some government funds to encourage opportunities for young people to participate in learning something about democracy. Education, as he well knows, is not an inexpensive venture. Some of these young people perhaps would not have those kinds of experiences without government support, and I'm sure there may be a fundraising element and a sacrifice by some of the families to encourage some of those young

people to participate in this. Regardless of what he thinks about what may be the ultimate outcome, the important thing is having young people understand specifically the inner workings of the electoral system processes, which is not easy to understand, and most people don't understand it. So I have to disagree with my good friend from Lanark-Carleton on this particular issue.

I must also say that if we looked deep within our hearts, we would know that the standard for changing a whole system has to be better than one person over and against everybody else who disagrees. That's not good enough.

Mr. Sterling: Or one party.

Mr. Patten: Or one party. Fair enough, member from Lanark-Carleton.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Barrett: The member for Timmins-James Bay essentially—and I'm sure we'll hear more from the member—has asked us to step back a bit and examine this proposal. The member for Lanark-Carleton has asked us to examine the books, to follow the money, if you will, and one trail does lead to this raid on the Trillium Foundation, something that does seem to be supported by the member for Ottawa Centre.

As far as this legislation and the comments on the citizens' assembly, I can speculate that they'll probably propose some form of proportional representation. It's 107 ridings in the next election. If it was a pure form of proportional representation, each party would submit a list of 107 names, and rather than directly electing MPPs, citizens would vote for their desired party. I think we could do the math on that one.

The member for Brampton Centre made reference to what we've been hearing a lot of this evening, those two words "cynicism" and "distrust." I am distrustful. I'm concerned. If we move away from electoral districts, if we move towards concentrating power in the hands of party elites, local citizens lose out. They obviously have fewer access points for their government, fewer access points for hands-on assistance with respect to the FRO cases and the birth certificate cases that crop up so often in our own ridings. So rather than being a silver bullet, in my view this proposal for proportional representation would remove accountability from the system, reduce accountability and detach people from their elected representatives.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. It being close to 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 2121.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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			Fonseca, Peter (L)
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Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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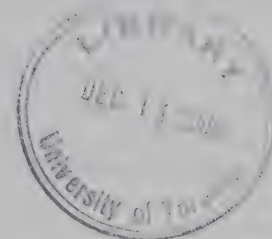
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**Legislative Assembly
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de l'Ontario**Deuxième session, 38^e législature**Official Report
of Debates
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des débats
(Hansard)****Wednesday 29 November 2006****Mercredi 29 novembre 2006**Speaker
Honourable Michael A. BrownPrésident
L'honorable Michael A. BrownClerk
Claude L. DesRosiersGreffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 29 November 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 29 novembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GYPSY MOTH INFESTATION

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I want to call the members of the assembly's attention to the growing concerns of taxpayers and homeowners in western Niagara regarding the recent problems with gypsy moth infestation. This past year, sadly, thousands of trees have been destroyed across Niagara, victims of the gypsy moths.

Experts who consulted with the township of west Lincoln are anticipating that the loss of local trees will be even worse next year if the spread of gypsy moths is left unchecked. Members know that this can result in a considerable and detrimental reduction in the aesthetic and recreational value of infested property. Worse still, tree loss from gypsy moth infestation also has a dramatic impact on the local natural system.

I recently wrote to the Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Ramsay, asking him to assist in a gypsy moth spraying program. In the past, the MNR has used helicopters to spray moth-infested woodlots in the program, cost-shared with landowners and the local municipality. I asked for the minister to restart that program even on a pilot-project basis to assist us in west Niagara.

The minister responded to me, indicating that he was not interested in doing so, and cited the example of Mississauga, which was funded totally by local landowners, with some support from the city. But I say to the minister, in a township the size of west Lincoln, with a very small industrial and commercial base, it is simply unaffordable. We are no Mississauga. I'd ask the minister to come forward with funding for a pilot program to combat gypsy moth infestation in Niagara.

NAVAN WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Navan Women's Institute for reaching its 75th anniversary, a remarkable milestone to attain.

This institute has a long history of dedicated service to women and their families, even during some very difficult times. One example is the beautiful quilts made by the women of the institute for soldiers fighting overseas during the First and Second World Wars, which still exist and are on display in Toronto.

Today the institute participates in local cultural events in Orléans, and works on national issues such as breast cancer research and awareness.

The institute is also making a difference in other parts of the world. For example, they are currently fundraising for the Stephen Lewis Foundation's Grandmothers to Grandmothers program. This program helps support grandmothers in Africa who are raising children orphaned by AIDS. The money raised by the institute will provide medicine and school supplies, helping those who are truly in need.

These activities are quite a change from the focus this organization had when it first began in 1931. At that time, the institute taught women how to manage their homes. Today, however, its focus has expanded to some of the most pressing social issues affecting women around the world.

Their concern for women's issues is also shared by this government. That's why we recently announced the \$4-million training program that will help vulnerable women develop new skills, find employment and achieve economic independence.

In that spirit of solidarity, I would like to thank the Navan Women's Institute for its 75 years of service and hope that they will continue for another 75 years, helping the women of the Ottawa–Orléans area and across the world.

SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): This week, dairy farmers and egg farmers were at the Ontario Legislature informing MPPs on the need to maintain supply management. John Tory and the opposition PC caucus unequivocally support supply management, on the understanding that supply management works on three pillars: import control, production discipline and producer pricing.

Like any three-legged stool, if one pillar is weakened, the whole system is compromised. For example, without import controls, production discipline becomes impossible. Without production discipline, pricing becomes impossible. Supply management balances supply with demand and prevents overproduction, flooded markets and depressed prices for farmers.

The entire PC caucus has signed the FarmGate5 petition in support of the five supply management sectors. In addition to the dairy farmers and the egg farmers, this includes the chicken farmers—these are the broiler pro-

ducers—the Ontario Broiler Hatching Egg and Chick Commission, and the turkey producers.

As for the McGuinty Liberals, 31 MPPs oppose supply management—they have not signed FarmGate5—including the Deputy Premier and the Attorney General. I urge this Ontario government, put your divisions aside. Sign the FarmGate5 petition in support of supply management. Why won't you sign it? Farmers are worried.

1340

LIBRARY SERVICES

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): Recently I had the opportunity to spend some time at the Bonfield Public Library. This coming Friday, I'm delighted to be opening the new Mattawa public library that is to be located in F.J. McElligott Secondary School in Mattawa. I'm amazed at the profound transformation that the library as an institution is going through. When I was a kid, libraries were simply about books. Today they are community hubs, dedicated to the advancement of literacy, learning and knowledge.

I'm very proud that this government invests more than \$28 million a year in Ontario's public and First Nations libraries. Last spring, our government announced an additional investment of \$15 million to support our library system. My libraries in North Bay, Callander, Bonfield, Powassan and Mattawa, to name but a few, were delighted.

As part of that investment, \$8 million was allocated to Knowledge Ontario, a program that was officially launched on November 20. Knowledge Ontario is a groundbreaking, multi-sector collaboration of public, university, college and school libraries. Thanks to the digital products and services offered by Knowledge Ontario, all Ontarians, no matter where they live, will be able to access the same rich, high-quality digital information using their library cards not only from the public library, but from their workplace, their school and their home computers. Province-wide access to Knowledge Ontario will create a level playing field to provide fast, seamless and free access to essential information and learning resources for all Ontarians.

I'm very proud that our government is committed to a public library system that promotes literacy and equal access to information—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Members' statements.

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): On November 20, I filed for a late show with the Minister of Energy, and that was scheduled for November 21. The minister personally came over and sat down beside me on the 21st and said, "Do you know what? I can't make it tonight." He said, "I'd like to be there myself." I said, "No problem, Minister. We'll reschedule it for next Tuesday."

Do you know what? Last night, Tuesday, the minister was a no-show—a no-show. The premise of this whole late show was about integrity, honesty and respect for Parliament, or lack thereof, of this government and this minister, because he made a commitment in Hansard to bring information forward and has refused to do so since then. What does he do on the day of the late show? He doesn't show up for that. He sent his parliamentary assistant, the member for Oakville, who never touched on the subject of the late show whatsoever; he waxed on about the purported work of the McGuinty government when it comes to energy.

Well, I'm going to tell you, this issue was about respect and integrity, and if the minister has that lack of respect for the members of this House, then the people of the province of Ontario should not be surprised to know that the McGuinty government has no more respect for you, because they break their promises to you every day in this House. They will say anything and do anything to get a vote. Shame on them.

MUNICIPAL AIRPORT FUNDING

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): Yesterday in the House, I had an opportunity to ask a question of the Minister of Transportation in regard—

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): You're full of crap, Ted.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member for Renfrew may wish to withdraw that last comment.

Mr. Yakabuski: I withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker: We'll restart the clock. Member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Bisson: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the opportunity to ask a question to the Minister of Transportation in regard to the request by northern communities to have the province do what they used to do, which is to fund municipal airports. Those airports are an integral part of the transportation hub for many of our communities in northern Ontario and at the same time make economic development possible. Without an airport, how are you able to attract investment, if you don't have a full transportation infrastructure in your community?

Yesterday, in her response to my question, the minister said bluntly that there was no money in the budget for them to be able to fund airports in northern Ontario, even though for years and years the province funded municipal airports and assisted municipalities in keeping those airports open. Communities like Earlton are in crisis. Wawa, White River and Kapuskasing, I know, are having to subsidize to a great degree out of their own municipal budgets and are finding it increasingly difficult to keep those airports open.

I urge the minister to do what is right, to take a look at what has to be done in order to fund those airports. They are part of our transportation hub. Without those airports, our communities are left in the dark in regard to being able to provide a full transportation infrastructure for

those communities. For the McGuinty government to say no to funding municipal airports in northern Ontario shows yet again that this government just doesn't get it when it comes to their responsibility to the northern part of this province.

JOB CREATION

Mr. David Oraziatti (Sault Ste. Marie): I want to talk about how our government gets it in Sault Ste. Marie. I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight for members the dramatic increase in the creation of jobs and new opportunities in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie. Since taking office, more than 200 new provincial jobs and more than 1,600 new private sector jobs have been created in my community, with more to come. In early 2004, the unemployment rate in Sault Ste. Marie was 8.4%. With thanks to the co-operation of local companies and provincial government initiatives, it is now down to 6.9%.

We've made great strides in diversifying our community's economy over the past three years. Our \$3-million investment in the Sutherland Group alone has created 1,400 new jobs for area residents; our \$15-million investment in the Borealis tourism development is expected to create an additional 600 new jobs; 60 new jobs are being created at the Pollard ticket finishing plant; 15 jobs were created with the opening of the nearly \$400-million Brookfield Power wind farm—the largest wind farm in Canada; with a new contract, we've also ensured employment for 332 workers at the Group Health Centre; 25 new jobs are being created at our new \$6-million youth justice facility; 25 new jobs were created with our \$3.6-million investment in Flakeboard Ltd.; the new provincial gas tax program created five new jobs; we've got 200 construction jobs at Algoma Steel working on a cogeneration facility. As Sault Ste. Marie's provincial representative, my primary concern has been the economic—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

VISITORS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just wanted to introduce to the House the members of the Ontario Real Estate Association who are visiting with us today. We welcome them.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Members' statements.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: I'd really prefer to finish members' statements. Members' statements. The member for Huron-Bruce.

LEN GERTLER

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): It's my pleasure to rise in the House to honour a great conservationist.

Len Gertler was considered a founding father of urban planning in Canada. In 1967, he looked at the environmental impacts of urban sprawl, mining and recreation on the Niagara Escarpment. His report, still referred to as the Gertler report, led to the development of the Niagara Escarpment plan, the first environmental land use plan in Canada and a cornerstone of the Ontario greenbelt. He also contributed to UNESCO, designating the escarpment as a World Biosphere Reserve in 1990.

In honour of all of Mr. Gertler's contributions, I am today pleased to announce that our government is renaming one of the most outstanding parks on the Niagara Escarpment, the Loree Forest, to the Len Gertler Memorial Loree Forest. This forest is located in the Blue Mountains, halfway between Collingwood and Thornbury, overlooking Georgian Bay.

Sadly, Mr. Gertler passed away in 2005, but I'm very pleased that his three sons are here today for this special occasions: Denis, with his wife, Maryjean Lancefield, and their children, Willa and Evan; Kim Gertler and family friend Mark McLean; and his other son, Meric Gertler, with his wife, Joanna, and son Miles.

Two of Mr. Gertler's sons visited the site earlier this year. Here's what they had to say: "The escarpment was a special place for our father, both as a natural treasure to protect and a focus for one of his greatest land use planning achievements. The Gertler family hopes Ontarians will come to the park and enjoy its trails, forests, views and peacefulness." Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Gertler.

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I would like to take this opportunity to welcome members of the Ontario Principals' Council who are here today to meet with members of the House.

The OPC is the professional organization representing 5,000 principals and vice-principals in our public elementary and secondary schools. The purpose of principals' day is to provide ongoing dialogue between elected members and school leaders. Principals deal with an assortment of issues and situations that arise in our schools every day. They're on the front line, and we very much appreciate the good work that they do.

As our government continues to focus on increasing the literacy levels for all students, principals act as instructional leaders, helping teachers enhance their skills so they in turn can help every single student to reach his or her full potential.

Today our schools are involved in many initiatives, helping students learn to read, keeping schools safe, finding alternative learning opportunities for our at-risk kids, encouraging students to stay in school longer and reinforcing the importance of character education. All of these initiatives occur under the guidance of our principals. They play a vital role in the success of our schools.

1350

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the principals here today and those across the province for coming here today, for the work that they do day in and day out, and for keeping us on top of all the positive things going on in our schools.

The McGuinty government is proud of the progress we're making in improving our education system across Ontario. We're also aware of the need to continue those efforts in the year ahead. We look forward to advancing the quality of education and working in partnership with those—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

VISITORS

VISITEURS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It's a pleasure for me to introduce two very good friends of mine who are in the members' east gallery today. Jack Doris has been a member of Peterborough city council since 1967. He served as mayor from 1991 to 1997 and was re-elected on November 13. I must say Jack Doris is also a cousin of the member from Durham. My other good friend is Glenn Pagett, who served on Peterborough city council for 28 years—he was my ward colleague for 15—and was the city of Peterborough's athlete of the year in 1960. I'd like to welcome them to the gallery today.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–Baie James): Sur un point d'ordre, j'aimerais féliciter la présence de notre traducteur—pas notre traducteur, l'instructeur de français pour nos greffiers, Patric, qui est ici avec nous aujourd'hui, puis on lui dit bonjour à notre parlement.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to introduce two of my constituents who won a day at the Legislature with their MPP: Sarah and Sheila. They're here to see what it's all about. Please be gentle today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on regulations and private bills and move its adoption.

The Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill Pr30, An Act respecting Red Leaves Resort Association.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 29, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1353 to 1358.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Bountrogianni, Marie
Bradley, James J.
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight

Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
Marsales, Judy
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Mitchell, Carol
Oraziotti, David
Parsons, Ernie
Patten, Richard
Peters, Steve

Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Smith, Monique
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Barrett, Toby
Bisson, Gilles
DiNovo, Cheri
Elliott, Christine
Hardeman, Ernie
Horwath, Andrea

Kormos, Peter
Marchese, Rosario
Martel, Shelley
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Murdoch, Bill
O'Toole, John

Ouellette, Jerry J.
Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.
Tabuns, Peter
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakubuski, John

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 34; the nays are 21.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

1400

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): I am pleased to rise and share with all members of this House the McGuinty government's progress in creating a culture of conservation in Ontario. Today, conservation leaders from across Ontario are participating in a con-

servation showcase that is being hosted by the Ministry of Energy and the Electricity Distributors Association. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members to attend. In a moment, I will recognize some of Ontario's conservation leaders who are with us today, but first let me spend a moment highlighting the progress Ontario has made in conservation over the past 36 months.

The McGuinty government has made energy conservation a cornerstone of its policy. For an entire generation, conservation was considered an afterthought, thanks to the neglect and misguided policies of previous governments. It's clear that the Tories had virtually no conservation policy when they were in office, but it was the third party that actually cancelled, in the early 1990s, every single electricity conservation program Ontario ever had. That set Ontario way back when it comes to energy conservation and energy efficiency. Just think of the progress we would have made if Ontario Hydro or its successor companies had continued with the target of achieving 5,200 megawatts by 2000. All of that was lost when those programs were cancelled. Between 1996 and 2004, total electricity use in Ontario increased by more than 10%. That's enough energy to power 1.5 million homes. In fact, thanks to these misguided policies, Ontarians consume more electricity per capita than any other place in the world with the exception of Quebec. We lost a lot of ground over the '90s.

Since day one, our government has been committed to rebuilding Ontario's conservation culture. Our goals are bold and our vision is clear: to make Ontario a leader in energy conservation and efficiency not only in Canada but in North America. To achieve this vision, we are working with a number of organizations, including non-profit organizations, Ontario's electric gas utilities, as well as innovative businesses that are all helping to create a culture of conservation in every corner of our province.

We know that leadership means we need to put our money where our mouth is by ensuring that we get our house in order when it comes to the government's energy consumption. We set a target of reducing our electricity consumption by 10% by the end of 2007. I'm pleased to report that as of today, we are more than 88% of the way to reaching our goal. We've gone further: Earlier this year, the House passed the energy conservation leadership act, the first law of its kind in Canada, which enables us to make the broader public sector accountable for energy conservation. We made amendments to increase energy efficiency in the Ontario building code and have used Ontario's Energy Efficiency Act to make Ontario one of the leaders when it comes to energy-efficient consumer products. In fact, Ontario now stands shoulder to shoulder with California, the leading jurisdiction in energy efficiency standards in North America, as 90% of our standards now meet or exceed California levels. In addition to measures such as these, we are working hard to make it easier for all Ontarians to conserve energy and save money. We have long recognized the important role local utilities can play through their relationship with customers. In 2004, we enabled a three-year program that

made \$163 million available to LDCs to develop local conservation and energy efficiency programs. This past summer, we announced another \$400 million in conservation funding through the Conservation Bureau to assist local utilities in their efforts to encourage energy conservation. As a result of this leadership, Ontario's local utilities are planning and/or delivering over 500 conservation programs to their customers. They are on the front lines when it comes to building a culture of conservation.

This includes leaders such as Michael Angemeer and David Collie of the Electricity Distributors Association, who are with us in the gallery today. Mike and Dave, thank you for all your hard work. Thank you for your commitment. Thank you for helping to build a conservation culture in Ontario.

The conservation efforts of EDA members have yielded a saving of over 16 million kilowatt hours so far. From Thunder Bay to Fort Frances, from Sault Ste. Marie to Ottawa, from Windsor to Kingston, LDCs are delivering conservation programs that are making a difference.

In addition to these LDC leaders, the non-profit sector has also been on the front lines when it comes to building a culture of conservation in Ontario. This includes leaders such as Chris Winter, the chair of the Conservation Council of Ontario, who has been an outstanding proponent for conservation in the province through programs such as Lighten Up, Ontario! and Doors Closed. Chris, please stand up and be recognized. Thank you for all that you have done.

I would also like to recognize Stuart Hickox of Project Porchlight, who is delivering change across Ottawa and soon in other communities across our province. Stuart, thank you for your hard work and the hard work of Project Porchlight. You are an inspiration to everybody in this province.

While local distribution companies and NGOs are delivering diverse programs across the province, we've also launched a number of province-wide initiatives to ensure Ontarians have the opportunity to participate, no matter where they live. The Conservation Bureau, an organization created by this government, has undertaken initiatives across the province to help individuals and businesses realize the tangible benefits of conservation. The bureau's Every Kilowatt Counts program is working with over 3,000 retailers across the province, providing rebates and incentives to Ontarians for energy-efficient products.

This fall, the Premier and I announced that we are taking three programs province-wide following successful pilots. By next summer, Ontarians will be able to take advantage of three new innovative powerWISE programs, including: a beer fridge bounty that will encourage Ontarians to get rid of energy-inefficient appliances; a 10-10 summer rewards program that will reward consumers who reduce their energy bills by 10% with an additional 10% discount; and an initiative to reduce peak energy demand which allows utilities to work with consumers to reduce electricity use by air conditioners and other major appliances at peak times.

We are building public awareness through our power-WISE public education campaign and are working to build a conservation culture in other ways. We are on track to having 800,000 smart meters installed in Ontario homes by the end of 2007 and for every consumer by 2010.

Creating a conservation culture is about more than just turning off the lights; it's about opportunity and innovation. It's about investing in change and investing in our future. That's why our government is investing up to \$2 billion for conservation initiatives.

Our efforts are starting to pay off. Just last month, the Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance upgraded its rating of Ontario's conservation efforts to a B+, the largest one-year increase the alliance has ever given to a province and the highest grade in this province's history.

Interjection: Well done.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Yeah. You know, B+ is a good mark, but we will not rest until Ontario gets an A. We have set an ambitious target for conservation over the longer term. We want to achieve 6,300 megawatts of conservation by 2025, and we are taking real steps to achieve our goal.

From an almost exponential growth in the use of compact fluorescent bulbs to conservation programs delivered by NGOs and local utilities in every corner of Ontario, this government—the McGuinty government—is committed to creating a culture of conservation that is the envy of our peers in Canada and North America.

I would like to thank all of the organizations that are participating in Ontario's conservation showcase, and I encourage all members of the House to see what Ontarians are doing across the province. Working together, we can ensure a bright energy future for our province and indeed a greener and healthier future across our province.

1410

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of Energy on his announcement today, or should I say re-announcement. What we get from the McGuinty government is a lot of talk and a lot less action, but a lot of re-announcements, over and over again, about programs they're proposing to do.

There's no question about it: Conservation is absolutely paramount if we're going to solve the energy situation in the province of Ontario, much of which is a result of their bungling and flip-flopping on key issues in the energy sector. We've heard all about that with regard to the on-again, off-again coal shutdown policy from the McGuinty government.

The minister talked about being 88% of the way to reaching the conservation goal within the government of Ontario. When you set the bar at that level, it should be doable. I might point out to the minister that, in our house alone, we've reduced our energy consumption by over 30% in that same period. So I think there's a long way to go, Minister. I wouldn't be bragging about 88% of 10%.

I think the minister should be talking a little about what's really happening in the energy sector. What's hap-

pening with their wind projects? They're telling people, "Shut her down, boys. We won't be taking that project." We don't have the transmission for it. We haven't thought far enough ahead to ensure that the transmission infrastructure would be in place so that we can bring the power that is produced at a wind farm to where it's actually needed. So maybe they should be talking to the people of the province about what they're failing to do, instead of always telling them what they plan to do or what they think they may have done. Most of it is just talk.

What about the ability to bring power to places where it's needed from upgrades that are happening at places like Bruce and new power generation that's supposed to be coming online from either gas plants or otherwise? What about getting that power to where it's needed?

I've got to tell you what Tom Adams had to say. He doesn't have a whole lot of faith in this government. He says, "Yet again, the Ontario government finds itself with the consequences of an ill-considered policy. What [makes energy minister Dwight Duncan] think he knows anything more about conservation, about wind power, about gas than he knows about coal?" That's what Tom Adams had to say. There's no faith out there in what these people are doing. Every day there's a new story.

At estimates committee, the minister said, when asked about the names of the people who gave them that advice on coal, "I'll get you that." Further on, he started to say that one of those people was Jack Gibbons. Jack Gibbons has vehemently denied that he ever gave that kind of advice to this government.

You're going to have to decide what your story on energy is going to be and quit trying to hornswoggle the people of the province of Ontario.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I am pleased to respond to yet another attempt by the McGuinty government to convince people that they actually have a conservation strategy rather than a conservation public relations strategy, to convince people that there's actually a culture of conservation rather a culture of conversation.

All you have to do is look at some of the government's own sources to see that much of what the minister said today is false. The minister wants people to believe that electricity consumption is going down. The Independent Electricity System Operator says, "Ontario set a new record of 27,005 megawatts for peak demand on August 1, 2006." So much for the McGuinty government's claim that electricity consumption is going down.

If you actually read all of the IESO report which came out just a short while ago, in October 2006, what they're predicting is that if Ontario gets another hot weather summer in 2007, we'll set another peak consumption of 27,513 megawatts. If you compare what they're looking at for winter consumption, they predict that the winter of 2006-07 will set a normal weather winter peak of 24,881, but in the winter of 2007-08 they predict a winter peak of 25,114.

So I'm left to ask, when the IESO says, "Look at the numbers. Consumption is going up," how does the

McGuinty government expect people across Ontario to swallow their argument that consumption is going down?

In fact, the IESO report is even more enlightening, because it says that to the extent that there was some reduction in consumption this year, it wasn't as a result of energy efficiency or conservation. They say that reduced energy-intensive industrial load has led to lower energy demand. What does that mean? It means literally dozens of pulp and paper mills shut down. It means 45,000 hard-working people are out of work. It's the first time, I think, in the history of Ontario that a government—the McGuinty government—says that putting 45,000 people out of work is a good thing and should be celebrated. I can't imagine any government ever trying to say that, but that is what the McGuinty government is pushing here today.

When I look at some of the other things that the minister had to say today, he talks about how there are incentives for conservation. There's a lot of advertising on buses, there's a lot of billboard advertising, there's a lot of television advertising, all of which is meant to convince people that some conservation is really happening. But do you know what? It's very hard to actually find financial incentives, especially for low- and modest- and fixed-income Ontarians, that would help them move toward energy efficiency and help them consume less.

Is there a low-interest loan so that someone existing on a low or modest income could buy an energy-efficient fridge in Ontario? No. Is there a low-interest loan or some financial incentive so that they could buy other energy-efficient appliances in Ontario under the McGuinty government? No. If somebody wants to retrofit their home and put in, say, high-efficiency natural gas heat and move off electric heat, or if they want to put in new windows and doors, is there a program available under this government that would provide that? No. Yet, incredibly, if I look to the province of Quebec, to the east, and the province of Manitoba, to the west, these things exist. Manitoba provides a financial incentive so people can purchase energy-efficient refrigerators and appliances, but not in Ontario—

The Speaker: Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Premier. In 2003, you promised to provide colorectal cancer screening to adults over the age of 50. You said that this would save hundreds of lives—and it would—and millions of dollars by keeping Ontarians healthy.

It is estimated today that about 3,000 Ontarians will die of colorectal cancer in this year, 2006, alone.

Premier, three years ago you made the promise. For three years, Ontarians have been waiting for you to keep your promise. On behalf of these Ontarians who are wait-

ing, I ask you today, when will you keep this promise and announce a program?

1420

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I appreciate the question, and I appreciate the genuine interest reflected in the question, and on the part of so many Ontarians who have raised this question with our government.

We have done much in the field of health care, whether you're talking about wait times, more doctors, more nurses or moving towards a local health integration network strategy to bring better focus to efforts on the ground, and we have yet to move forward in this area. I can assure the member opposite that we certainly intend to do so before the election.

Mrs. Witmer: The Premier made this promise three years ago. Because of the inaction, the Colorectal Cancer Association of Canada issued a press release on November 21 of this year. They called on the McGuinty Liberals "to urgently and without further delay"—which means not before the next election, because how could they even be confident you would keep your word; you haven't kept your word so far—keep your promise to introduce a colorectal screening program and to increase access to PET scans.

In June of this year, your Minister of Health told us at estimates, twice, that he is going to move forward with the program this year. He said it two times. Premier, there are 32 days left in this year. What day this year will your government be making the announcement?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The member may not know that the minister has said that he has received a first proposal that didn't include family doctors enough. He has indicated that he wants to get it right. Of course, the previous government did not move on this front. We think it's important that we move on this front. By the way, when we do move on this front we will be the first government in Canada to do so.

Mrs. Witmer: Premier, I would remind you that you made the promise. People are waiting. It is more than three years. In fact, people will think that they are hearing the sound of yet another promise being broken. Your minister said he was going to make the announcement this year.

I want to ask you about PET scans because, again, we couldn't get an answer from the minister yesterday. As you know, Ontarians today cannot get access to PET scans, despite the fact that the rest of Canada does. The Colorectal Cancer Association of Canada says, "The refusal of Ontario to increase access to PET scans means patients are denied an essential tool in the treatment of the disease." Yesterday, I raised the issue of Janet Franks of Barrie. Her oncologist requested a PET scan. She was turned down for the clinical trials.

My question for you, Premier, is this: When will the trials end? They have been going on for almost five years. When will all Ontarians get access to PET scans like—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Maybe the best thing I can do is quote Dr. Bill Evans, who is chair of the Ontario PET steering committee. He's an oncologist and president of Hamilton's Juravinski Cancer Centre. He said just recently in the *Globe and Mail*:

"There's been criticism in Ontario in its seeming tardiness to adopt. But it's a decision taken by cancer specialists of the province, various surgeons and medical and radiation oncologists.... In cancer, we have to figure out how best to use it.' When the clinical trials are completed, 'there will be a lot of people who will thank us.'"

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): For the past several months, it seems every time we turn around in Ottawa there's more bad news about health care. First, it was Ottawa's seniors, who we've learned have the second-highest wait-list in the province when it comes to trying to find a long-term-care bed.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): We need to know to whom the question is addressed.

And I need quiet.

Ms. MacLeod: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. It's to the Premier.

Then it was Ottawa's children, who have to wait longer than any other children in the province for pediatric surgeries. Yesterday, we learned that Ottawa has the absolute worst wait times for radiation treatments in all of Ontario.

The Premier promised to reduce wait times and he is breaking that promise to the very people who elected him. Will the Premier please stand up and tell us why his government is neglecting Ottawa when it comes to improving health care?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I know that the member opposite is relatively newly elected, but she cannot be so unfamiliar with what has happened in Ottawa with respect to new investments in health care.

I'll just list some of these things. We have a newly expanded cancer centre, with sites at the Ottawa Hospital and the Queensway Carleton Hospital, reducing our wait times to about three weeks. There is a new Royal Ottawa Hospital. There is an expanded Montfort Hospital in the works. It's going to nearly double its current size. There is an expanded Queensway Carleton Hospital, with a new emergency wing expansion at the civic site of the Ottawa Hospital. There's a new critical care wing at the Ottawa Hospital general site. There are expansions at CHEO, including a new ICU wing with oncology and ambulatory care.

It's pretty hard to walk by any hospital or health institution in the city of Ottawa and not find some kind of construction activity taking place there. The member opposite is sadly mistaken in terms of her assessment.

Ms. MacLeod: The Premier can talk about all the fancy photo ops he wants to, but the fact is that

under his government, the people of Ottawa are not getting the health care they need when they need it.

This government promised to reduce wait times, but all across Ottawa that promise has been broken. According to latest round of data, the Montfort has seen cancer surgery wait times up by a whopping 323%. Hip replacement wait times are up 87%. At the U of O Heart Institute, bypass surgery wait times are up 12%. Overall in Ottawa, knee replacement and CT scan wait times are up. No matter where you look in Ottawa, wait times are up.

This government is short-changing the people of Ottawa when it comes to timely access to health care. Why aren't the Premier and his government taking the steps to address these growing wait times seriously and take real steps to address them in our city?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think a brief history lesson would be in order. The former Conservative government tried to shut down the Montfort Hospital; the former Conservative government tried to shut down the cardiac centre at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. The former Conservative government did succeed in shutting down the Riverside hospital; the former Conservative government did succeed in shutting down the Grace Hospital.

We are undergoing a virtual renaissance in Ottawa when it comes to investment in our health care institutions. We've got more nurses, more doctors, more ability and more capacity to deal with more patients and continue to get our wait times down.

Ms. MacLeod: Again, the Premier can try to hide from his record by bringing up the previous government all he likes. He can talk about his announcements and province-wide statistics, he can even talk about the few areas where we have seen marginal improvements, but the fact of the matter is that Ottawa is suffering under his leadership.

A report in the *Ottawa Citizen* last month said, "The region has ... wait times that are higher than the provincial [numbers]," and the government's wait times website confirms this. Cancer surgeries, bypass surgeries, cataracts, hip replacements, knee replacements, MRIs and CTs: In all five priority areas, with very, very few exceptions, the wait times at Ottawa hospitals are higher than the provincial numbers.

Either Ottawa is being terribly neglected or chronically underfunded—or both. When is this Premier going to turn this around? When is he going to address the health care crisis in his own hometown? Does he even have a plan?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: We've been working very hard to clean up the mess left by the previous government and to restore to some significant capacity our ability to help our families in Ottawa when it comes to their health issues.

When it comes to wait time results, first of all we're very proud of the fact that we're collecting this information for the first time, and secondly, we're making it publicly available. Armed with that information, we can then focus our resources and our initiatives.

Overall in Ontario, angiography is down by 39%; angioplasty waits are down by 17.9%; cataract surgery is down by 27%; hip replacement wait times are down by 19.9%; knee replacement wait times are down by 19.8%; MRIs are down by 13.3%; and CT scans are down by 2.5%.

We have been very successful in driving these wait times down and we will continue to do more in the days, weeks, months and years ahead.

1430

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Premier: Premier, 136,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs have been destroyed in Ontario under the McGuinty government. In October alone, 18,000 manufacturing jobs were destroyed. In September alone, Ontario's manufacturing shipments fell an astonishing 5%.

The evidence grows every day and Ontario needs a new economic policy toolbox to sustain and create good-paying manufacturing jobs. Premier, as Ontario loses thousands of good-paying manufacturing jobs virtually every week, what is the McGuinty government's plan to sustain our manufacturing jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The leader of the NDP cannot have noticed, obviously, what we've been doing, together with the private sector, to ensure that we experience more growth and more prosperity, whether it's our advanced manufacturing plan, our auto sector strategy, our forestry sector strategy or the work we've been doing with the agriculture sector.

Let me just take the opportunity today to welcome a delegation in the gallery here from Shell. This is a group of people from a company which has now committed to a \$50-million viability study for a new refinery near Sarnia. This company has already secured 5,000 acres of land slated for industrial development. This will be the first new refinery in Canada in over 20 years. This is not just any feasibility study; this is a \$50-million feasibility study, involving 40 full-time people on the job to ensure that we make of this success. I think that speaks volumes to the sense of confidence in our economy.

Mr. Hampton: Well, I hope that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. Order.

The leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, I hope that this promise on your part actually turns out, unlike all the other promises you've made on jobs. Because what's happened in the forest sector is 45,000 jobs destroyed. What's happened in Sarnia is thousands of jobs destroyed in the chemical industry. And what's happened in the auto parts picture is not any better. For example, in the Niagara region, virtually every day the local papers carry stories of more jobs lost in the auto sector. As we speak, Dana Canada in Thorold has begun to lay off 537 long-time workers.

Premier, maybe you can tell us, since you don't seem to have a strategy for your government to sustain manufacturing jobs, why did you vote against my proposal to create a jobs commissioner, something that has a lot of support among labour leaders, among business leaders and among a lot of community leaders? Why wouldn't you at least support that initiative?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: We're going to focus our energy on working with the private sector, management and labour alike, in order to help grow this economy. That's what we've been doing in the past, and that's what we will continue to do in the future.

One more piece of good news—and I know this comes as anathema to the leader of the NDP, but it's something the rest of us like to hear from time to time: The auto sector in Ontario has received the recent distinction of being, for the third year in a row, and for the first time since the invention of the car, number one in North America when it comes to auto production. Again, that speaks to the sense of confidence that the private sector has in the Ontario economy.

Mr. Hampton: The Premier wants to celebrate the collapse of the auto manufacturing sector in Michigan and say that this is wonderful news.

Today, Ford announced a further 215 workers laid off at the Oakville assembly plant. Manufacturing jobs are being lost virtually everywhere across this province. And despite widespread support for the idea of a jobs commissioner to bring some focus, to bring some resources to sustaining manufacturing jobs, your government has voted against it.

Premier, if you don't think a jobs commissioner would help put some focus on this jobs crisis, what is your plan, other than talking about the misery of Michigan?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I want to remind the leader of the NDP that he and his party voted against every single initiative within our budgets that would lend additional support, additional strength, additional effort to Ontario's manufacturing sector, whether it's the half-billion-dollar investment in our auto sector strategy—they're against that; whether it's our \$500-million advanced manufacturing investment strategy—they're against that; whether it's our agri-food sector supports of \$910 million—they're against that; whether it's our forest sector policy of over \$1 billion—they're against that; whether it's our TV and film sector proposal and initiative of increased tax credits of \$10 million—they're against that as well. Every time we put forward a positive proposal that is well received by the people of Ontario, the manufacturing sector, the private sector, the economy in general, they stand opposed to that. We've got a different approach.

Mr. Hampton: Yes, Premier, I am opposed to a McGuinty government strategy that destroys 45,000 forest sector jobs in less than two years.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Premier: Hard-working Ontario families know the

economic and social benefits that come when their children receive a good education. But today, under the McGuinty government, one out of three high school students drops out of high school without graduating. The solution is to increase supports for students, not lower standards for graduation.

My question is this: Why is the McGuinty government intent on granting high school credits without the requisite curriculum elements and skills components? Why does the McGuinty government favour McCredits?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): It is absolutely the intention of this government, with every policy that we put in place, with every dollar that we invest in public education in this province, to improve the achievement of students. In fact, last year 6,000 more students graduated from high school than the year before. So Bill 52, which is the legislation that is sort of the tip of the iceberg in our learning-to-18 strategy, what it indicates is that we are providing new programming for students, new opportunities for students who might not otherwise stay in high school. That's what this is about, getting the students who are at risk to become re-engaged in the education process, whether that's in a mainstream classroom or in an alternative setting, so that they will stay in school, graduate and be able to be fully participating citizens.

Mr. Hampton: It's incredible. I simply asked the McGuinty government to rule out the granting of McCredits, and you can't even do that. Teachers, school boards and educators agree that reducing the quality of education, reducing the standards, is the wrong way to go.

Here's what a school board in Hamilton has written: "[Bill 52 could] significantly devalue [a high school graduation] certificate." The school board in Hamilton calls it "outsourcing education."

You've already admitted now that McCredits won't be taught by teachers and will take money out of the classroom. My question is this: Why are you pushing ahead with a bill that may help your graduation statistics but won't do anything for graduating students because the standards indeed are going to be lower?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: It's very interesting that a member of a party that, when it was in office, did absolutely nothing to address the dropout rate—in fact, when the member opposite was in office of as part of the government, they didn't even know what the dropout rate was. They weren't tracking the dropout rate.

What we've done is specify that every high school credit that is attributed in this province is going to be issued by the principal of a high school. That is enshrined in the legislation.

I want to read a quote: "The SWAC program allows students to explore the 'trades' while being treated as adults." This is a student from Brantford speaking. "I love the college setting and find it less distracting than high school. I like working at my own pace to make up

credits and find that I try harder than ever to complete work. Students are able to recover credits in order to graduate and now they feel like they have a future."

That is what this is about: more students in high school, more teachers in our high schools, more students graduating and more students being able to go—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary?

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Mr. Hampton: I think everyone recognizes that our high school students need more support in the classroom, but here's the McGuinty government record: You cut grants for inner-city schools and students at risk by \$120 million; more than half of Toronto schools with students learning English don't have an ESL teacher; there are 60,000 students on the waiting list for special education under the McGuinty government.

You could—you should—tackle these problems and do it in the classroom. Instead, what's the McGuinty government going to do? You're going to take money out of the classroom, you're going to take resources out of the classroom, and you're going to use people who are not professional teachers. This amounts to transferring resources out of the schools and transferring activity away from professional teachers into McCredits, doesn't it, Minister?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Just to the first two points the member opposite talked about: In terms of funding for inner-city schools or students who are struggling, the learning opportunities grant has gone up \$160 million since we've been in office. The funding for assessments: Last year alone we put \$20 million in the hands of the Ontario Psychological Association to deal with the backlog in assessments.

In terms of the dollars being invested, that \$2.75 billion is real money that's gone into the system that has alleviated the stresses. The bottom line on this issue is, we will not give up on the students who are not completing high school in this province. We will not relegate those kids to a future without access to opportunity because the member opposite thinks that we shouldn't be looking for alternatives that are being developed in the system by teachers. That's where our pilots began, and that's what we're going to build on.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): To the Premier: Yesterday, your trained acolytes voted against the John Tory motion that would require the government to keep track of the number of people committing crimes while out on bail. The government currently keeps track of the number of cows and pigs on the province's farms, the number of eggs laid by poultry, the number of fishing and hunting infractions and on and on. We know the Toronto police believe that at least 40% of the gun crimes committed in this city in the past year have been committed by people out on bail, yet somehow you and your Liberal colleagues don't think it's appro-

priate for the people of the province to know how many people are committing crimes while out on bail. Can you explain why that position is being taken by you and your members?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): There's a little bit of confusion with respect to what the position of the official opposition is. We heard the Premier say to Mr. Tory that in fact it would be inappropriate, and everybody, I would have thought, would agree that it would be totally inappropriate, for the Legislature to interfere with the judiciary. Mr. Tory said, "Not at all. I'd just like to see the aggregate numbers." But then later on, after Mr. Tory left the chamber, Mr. Runciman said this: "I would ... go a little further than our leader with respect to the reporting that is required.... I think there is a significant need to know what's going on.... That's my view, not necessarily the party's view."

The government's view is in fact that what we are going to do is work with the federal government, work with police officers and work with crown attorneys to do everything we can to fight to lower gun crime in every single way possible, and we will continue to, in any way, shape or form, work with members in this House and in the federal Parliament to continue to do that, and that makes our streets safer.

Mr. Runciman: I think the Liberals and the Attorney General are more interested in protecting judges from potential embarrassment than shining a light on the real problems in this justice system. That's the reality. We know we have real problems. We're talking about bail statistics here. We've had some horrific crimes committed by people out on bail, yet you do not want to release that information to the public. We have to know what the problems are in the system. This is not in any way, shape or form interfering with judicial independence, but you always want to hide behind that skirt. That is not a valid argument. This is important information for the public to know, for you to know, for members of this assembly to know: How well is the system performing or not performing? Why will you not release that kind of information?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: Again, I think the goal here is to increase public safety, is it not? The goal here is to lower the incidence of gun violence, is it not? The goal here is to have the toughest bail laws that we can have. Thanks to the leadership of the Premier, we have finally a bill before the federal Parliament and we're able to move forward with reverse onus on bail when it comes to gun crime. It is not to engage in the kind of demonization that the member is referring to of the independent judiciary that is going to make our streets safer; it's rather that we are going to move forward with concrete changes—not the kind of tactics that the member's referring to, but concrete changes and concrete investments, working with chiefs of police, ensuring that prosecutors have the tools they need to make our streets safer. And we will continue to do just that.

WATER AND SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question is for the Premier. A report released today reveals that millions of litres of raw sewage are dumped into the Great Lakes every year. This means closed public beaches; it means degraded water quality for Ontarians.

Your government is very fond of talking about how much it's investing to protect water sources, yet raw sewage continues to flow into our rivers and lakes. I have a very simple question, Mr. Premier: How much money will ReNew Ontario spend on renewing that water and sewage infrastructure by the end of October 2007?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I'm very pleased to have a chance to thank Sierra for the report that they issued today with respect to water quality in the Great Lakes—and the work that we continue to do in this province to rebuild infrastructure that has languished for so many years. But let me tell you what else we're doing. We've passed the Clean Water Act, which for the first time has given tools to the municipalities along the Great Lakes to examine their sources of drinking water and undertake scientific analysis together. We have provided them with funding in order to be able to do that. You, sir, and your party and the party opposite voted against that.

We've also been rolling up our sleeves to work hard with the federal government—the Minister of Natural Resources, last year, a historic agreement to see no diversions of water from the Great Lakes. There are many, many bodies, whether they're municipal, whether they're federal, whether they're provincial or stateside, on both sides of the border, that need to do a great deal of work with respect to the Great Lakes. Let me tell you, we have our sleeves rolled up and we are doing that work.

Mr. Tabuns: Premier, in the cabinet meetings—I know, Mr. Premier, but I'm going to come back to you because I asked a question about how much is going to be spent, and the minister clearly has no idea. There's none listed on the website, so she has no idea.

I have a question from a different angle for you, Mr. Premier. The Great Lakes Sewage Report Card says that Ontarians are unable to determine the magnitude of sewage flowing into their lakes and rivers because in fact the data isn't available to them.

That information is made available to you, Premier. That information is made available to the government, but you don't make it available to the public. So I'm going to ask you: Will you commit to doing something that doesn't require legislation? It's very simple. Will you let the public know the volume of combined sewer overflow, sewer system overflow, sewage bypass and sewage spills? Will you make that information available to the public?

Hon. Ms. Broten: I know that the Minister of Public Infrastructural Renewal is anxious to answer this question.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I'm very eager because I had the chance at estimates committee to take the member through the figures in ReNew Ontario and about all of the investments, and I'm very happy to share that again here.

In the Ontario small town and rural program: over a period of time, over \$3 million invested in 213 municipalities. Millennium Partnerships: \$28 million—

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): Boring.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The member opposite says, “Boring,” but the people of London, Waterloo region, Niagara, Hamilton, Windsor and Sudbury don't think their water quality is boring, my friend. Canada strategic infrastructure fund: \$35 million in Hamilton; \$25 million in Kingston. COMRIF, intakes 1 and 2: \$81.4 million and \$77.5 million, respectively. The Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority: over \$1.3 billion in low-cost financing for municipalities right across the province.

There is much more work to do, but this government takes a back seat to no one when it comes to investing in our precious water and waste water resources, and I'm not taking any lectures from this member.

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SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, today is Principals' Day here at Queen's Park. I had the opportunity to meet with members of the Ontario Principals' Council. I want to thank Henry Mick and Lisa Vincent for taking time out of their busy schedules to meet with me today.

The McGuinty government recognizes the key leadership role of principals and vice-principals in our schools. They're our curriculum leaders, facilitators and team builders.

Our government has always recognized that principals and vice-principals are vital to the success of our students. They've helped to ensure that we reduce primary class sizes in the early years, implement initiatives that are helping students graduate, work with the community to ensure that our students are learning in safe environments, and reach every student to unlock their full potential.

We value the leadership and guidance that principals and vice-principals demonstrate to teachers, staff and students, and we also appreciate the work they do with the boards and the ministry.

Minister, can you tell us what the McGuinty government has done over three years to foster a strong relationship with principals and vice-principals in this great province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): Thank you to the member for Peterborough for his question.

I want to thank all the vice-principals and principals who are here today. I met with Blair Hilts and Mike Benson of the OPC, who are in the gallery with us. I want the members to know that I am in regular contact with all the principals' groups. I think I've met with the OPC three times.

Almost a year ago, Minister Kennedy released a discussion paper, *Leading Education: New Supports for Principals and Vice-Principals in Ontario Publicly Funded Schools*, and that lays out some specific proposals.

What we've done already is we have started to address the workload issues. We have set up a new teacher performance appraisal process for new teachers and also are working on a performance appraisal process for experienced teachers. There's a pilot going looking at alternative management models.

The bottom line is that we are very aware of some of the workload issues that the principals have brought to us, and we're putting in place some structures to deal with those.

Mr. Leal: We certainly have been working tirelessly to correct what we inherited from the previous government, including our relationship with principals and vice-principals in the education sector.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. I'm having difficulty hearing the member for Peterborough. I will remind the members that when one member is speaking, the other members are quiet.

The member for Peterborough.

Mr. Leal: One accomplishment that we're particularly proud of and one that's shared by the Ontario Principals' Council is ensuring that we have peace and stability in the classroom. We'll not forget that between 1996 and 2003, our students lost more than 26.5 million days due to strikes. Teachers, principals and vice-principals were distracted then and did their best to educate our students under very demoralizing circumstances.

When I met with members of the Ontario Principals' Council today, they expressed how pleased they are with the initiatives that are happening to boost student achievement.

Minister, can you outline some of the concerns outlined by the principals today and share with this House how the McGuinty government is addressing their concerns?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: The advice that I'm going to receive from the minister's principal reference group is going to be very important to me as we move forward on this.

One of the issues that has been raised is the issue of supervision. That's the time that a teacher is assigned to supervise students outside the instructional day. I know that we're going to be having an ongoing conversation with the principals. The Provincial Stability Commission was set up to actually facilitate a discussion about specific instances where there was a conflict, where there were issues between teachers and a board.

I think what's really important is that we recognize that during the previous regime—and the member from

Peterborough has mentioned this—the relationships were frayed by the previous government. The relationships between teachers, principals and boards were undermined, and what we're doing by having the reference group, by having the Provincial Stability Commission, by our attempts with the ministry to have ongoing conversations with the principals and move forward in concrete ways, is we're re-establishing those relationships.

WATER AND SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Today, a sewage report card was released by Sierra Legal. The report states that the city of Toronto spews over 9.9 billion litres of raw sewage into Lake Ontario; Hamilton spews over four billion litres; and Windsor spews nearly two billion litres. London, Sarnia, Sudbury and Kingston are also in the report.

Minister, those are disgraceful numbers. But what is even more appalling is that these are the same cities that are in desperate need of water and waste-water infrastructure repair and have been asking for you to respond to your own Watertight report, which is over 15 months old.

You continue to break your promises, you've refused to answer questions on this important matter and you force the ongoing pollution of our Great Lakes. When will you get to work and respond to the report and begin consultations on regulations with respect to the Water and Sewer Systems Act?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): It's always rich to hear from my friends opposite, who not only left this province in financial ruin but in an infrastructure deficit and ruin. I always look forward to working with groups like Sierra Legal, which has put this information out. I would say to my friend opposite that on many fronts we are working to ensure the protection of the Great Lakes, because that is a source of drinking water, of economic renewal, of importance to all of us right across the province and certainly to me at home. My own riding, Etobicoke–Lakeshore, is right on Lake Ontario. I look at that lake every single day.

We are doing, on a number of fronts, initiatives to ensure that the Great Lakes are clean and continue to be a source of drinking water. Many of the communities that are mentioned that have not received stellar grades in the Sierra Legal report have been indicated to be upgrading their sewage treatment facilities. I know that the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal will look forward to talking about some of those sewage treatment facilities that have been upgraded, because we have put real and significant dollars—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. Scott: Do you know what's really rich? It's the minister's lack of commitment for the environment. She says she shares the concerns of municipalities.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. Minister of Municipal Affairs. Order. Government House leader. The Minister of Energy. Order. I can wait. The member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock.

Ms. Scott: It is the minister's lack of commitment for the environment. She says in this quote that she "shares the concerns of municipalities," but the minister and her government have proven time and time again that they are nothing more than paper environmentalists.

Minister, you know it. You will say anything to get elected. You continue to attack Ontarians in rural municipalities by implementing the avoidance of responsibility legislation like the spills bill, like the Clean Water Act, yet you refuse to address the desperate issue of aging infrastructure spewing billions of litres of waste into the Great Lakes—

Interjections.

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs will come to order. I'm going to have to remind the government that I need to be able to hear the question. That can't happen if other people are talking or, even worse, loudly interjecting. So I need you to be quiet. The next government member who makes a comment, I will name. The member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock.

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Ms. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the third time, I'll try.

Minister, the Environmental Commissioner's report recommends that you ensure transparency and accountability in the Canada-Ontario agreement, at which you are failing. Are you willing to do that? Will you call for an independent review of your ministry's involvement into the Canada-Ontario agreement?

Hon. Ms. Broten: I think my friends opposite need a research budget that's a little bit bigger so that they understand what the Canada-Ontario agreement is and can pay attention to the historic things this government has undertaken.

On December 13, 2005, our Premier signed the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement—a virtual ban on diversions, a basin-wide environmental standard, with better conservation measures and increased science standards with respect to decision-making. We have followed that up with the passing of the Clean Water Act, which provides us with the largest scientific exercise—\$120 million, with \$7 million for immediate work being done, much of it with respect to the Great Lakes. Your party and your leader voted against that historic piece of legislation.

The Canada-Ontario agreement expires in March 2007. We are actively engaged in the renewal and re-examination of that, but you could assist us in placing a call to the federal government. Get the federal government engaged. It is an international agreement, after all.

BY-ELECTIONS

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Premier. The citizens in Markham, Burling-

ton and York South–Weston are currently without representation in this Legislature.

In the past—not now, but in the past—you have spoken about the importance of respecting democracy and local members of provincial Parliament. But yesterday, after the media got wind of your secret caucus meeting held outside the confines of this building, your finance minister and campaign chair hinted to them that by-elections won't be called this winter. He further went on to say that you might not even deign to call them in the spring.

Residents of these three ridings have been without representation for over 70 days, over two months. When are you, Mr. Premier—it's your responsibility; don't fluff this off—going to call the by-election?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): My friend opposite made reference to the secret meeting where I scrummed outside with the media.

Let me just take the opportunity to say that I enjoyed campaigning recently with our nominated candidate in the riding of Markham, Michael Chan. I am very, very proud of the fact that he's chosen to run under a Liberal ticket. He is very eager, obviously, to embrace the confines of a provincial by-election. We look forward to giving this more thought and more energy, and we'll provide the necessary intentions in due course.

Mr. Prue: Again, to the Premier: When residents of York South–Weston phone their MPP's constituency office looking for help, what do they get? They get a message from Bell Canada saying that the line has been disconnected.

Not too long ago, an MPP stood in this Legislature and introduced a bill that would “end the century-old practice of allowing the Premier of the province to determine the timing of a by-election,” and ensure that, 70 days after the death or resignation of a member, a by-election would be held. That MPP was your own seat-mate, Greg Sorbara.

It's been more than 70 days since the residents of York South–Weston and Markham lost their MPPs. Will you support the spirit of Mr. Sorbara's legislation and set a date for these by-elections?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I appreciate the member's interest in a date for these by-elections. I know that all three parties, of course, have a tremendous interest in the by-elections and their outcome. All I can say is that in the fullness of time, I'll be making the appropriate announcement.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): My question is to the Minister of Energy. The McGuinty government is committed to conservation. The initiatives, partnerships and leadership in the conservation showcase that we are celebrating today are a testament to that. This includes the good work done by Veridian Connections, the LDC in my riding, which has a number of programs to help

their customers conserve energy, like their Tune up and Save program for electric water heaters.

As your statement highlighted, the collective efforts of all Ontarians, from energy experts to our youngest energy consumers, are starting to move this province forward by changing for the better our energy awareness, energy consumption and ultimately our environment.

Minister, you can please share with us how these accomplishments advance your larger energy plan for Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): First of all, I would like to thank the member, Mr. Rinaldi, his constituents and Veridian Connections for their contribution to our conservation success.

Our government has a balanced, responsible plan for Ontario's energy future, and building a culture of conservation is central to that plan. Ontarians have told us that they want to conserve electricity and that they want to save money on their energy bills, and we're giving them the tools they need to conserve energy.

The fact is that we're now conserving about 2% of our total power supply; that's around 675 megawatts. I think that we on this side of the House know we can do better. That's why the Ontario Power Authority recommended we set a target of 3,150 megawatts of energy conservation by 2025, and we told them that that wasn't enough. We asked them to double it to 6,300 megawatts. It's an aggressive target, and one we can achieve. That, I think, is one of the reasons the Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance has given us a B+ on all of our conservation efforts. We look forward to working with the member—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rinaldi: Minister, it's clear that this government and Ontario's energy conservation leaders are making energy conservation part of our daily lives at home and at work.

It's unfortunate that the Tories and the NDP didn't understand the importance of conservation when they were in government and cut programs instead of bringing them online. It's even more unfortunate that they voted against our energy conservation legislation, the first of its kind in Canada.

Minister, you told the OPA that we could do more when it comes to energy conservation. What are your plans to continue fostering a culture of conservation in the next few years and beyond, and what kinds of benefits can the people of Ontario continue to expect?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Our government is leading by example. We set a target of 10% for our own electricity consumption. We are 88% of the way there and will achieve the 10% by this time next year.

We have legislated improvements to the Energy Efficiency Act and the Ontario building code that will bring Ontario in line with or exceed the standards set in California, which is regarded as one of the leading jurisdictions in the world.

We are also investing in a broader conservation culture. We have made up to \$2 billion available to local distribution companies as well as to the power authority to bring these programs province-wide. The province-wide programs include a beer fridge bounty, a peak reduction program and a summer savings 10-10 program. All these programs will boost the amount of electricity we conserve while helping Ontario families save money. That's what our plan is all about.

Building this culture takes time. It's a slow process; it's a challenging one. But we're seeing success already, and I believe that with the assistance of the people of this province we will become the leader in energy conservation and energy efficiency.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a question for the Premier. Newspapers across the province have harsh words for your handling of the Caledonia occupation. Let me refresh your memory.

The Simcoe Reformer calls the McGuinty approach to Caledonia "impotence at its worst," and says that every man and woman in your caucus should be ashamed.

The Hamilton Spectator noted that there was "precious little evidence of progress."

The Sudbury Star and North Bay Nugget warn that "there is a dangerous precedent being set."

Premier, you have proven time and time again that you are prepared to concede every position you've taken. You said there would be no further negotiations until there was co-operation from First Nations in apprehending individuals wanted by the police for violent acts, including attempted murder and assault. There is still a warrant out for a gentleman wanted for attempted murder.

Why have you reversed yourself and continued negotiations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Speaker, to the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I'd say to the member that he should feel proud, being a member of this Legislative Assembly, of how Ontario has handled this very volatile situation, that we have lowered the temperature of this dispute. There has been no loss of life. While there have been minor incidents over the duration of this occupation, there has been no serious injury to people.

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This government has responded not only to the concern of the Six Nations, which basically is a problem between them and the federal government, but we have reminded the federal government of that. We were the ones who did step in and got this onto a table of discussion, away from the heat of an occupation. It is very quiet now and we are working towards a solution at that table that we designed.

Mr. Miller: Premier, proud? Almost 300 days that this occupation has been going on, millions of tax dollars spent. The community is still disrupted.

You and your minister responsible for aboriginal affairs have contradicted yourselves so often I can hardly keep track. Before your recent attempts to rewrite the facts, your government said that the occupied land in Caledonia did not constitute a land claim, but was rather an accounting dispute. Your handling of the Caledonia affair is another prime example of your "say anything" approach to government.

Let me remind you of something else you said. In August, you said that it would be unacceptable for the occupation to continue through the winter. Well, Premier, winter is almost here. Do you stand by your comments made this summer, or are you planning on contradicting yourself again?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I would very proudly stand in my place and say that we are very proud of our approach, compared to a past approach that cost a life in Ontario, the first time an aboriginal person has lost their life in this province. That was not the way we were going to proceed with this; it's not the way we are proceeding with this. We have cooled this down, and we've brought this to a negotiating table. That's the way we're dealing with this and that's the way we're going to continue to deal with this.

FOOD BANKS

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Health Promotion. Yesterday the Ontario Association of Food Banks reported that food bank usage is up by 18.6% since 2001. More working Ontarians than ever are accessing them because they cannot purchase food.

You talk about healthy eating. You say, "We are on the side of Ontario families who care about their health." Minister, disabled people, children living on social assistance and our working poor care about their health too. You are certainly not on their side.

When will you put your money where your mouth is and fully index the clawback of the national child tax benefit and increase the minimum wage to \$10 an hour so these people can purchase their own food?

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): Let me just comment on our healthy eating, active living strategy and perhaps in the supplementary, it may be more appropriate that it go to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Today, as a matter of fact, over 650 people from across the province of Ontario are gathering for the first-ever Healthy Eating, Active Living Conference down at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. I have to pass along to the Premier and to other members of cabinet the best wishes and the congratulations of the Honourable Roy Romanow, who praised this government for its progressive stand when it comes to the healthy eating, active living strategy, which was a \$10-million strategy

announced just a few months ago. This included a very successful pilot project in the Timmins area for fresh fruits and vegetables, because we understand there are certain determinants of health with respect to transportation costs to get fresh fruit and vegetables to the north.

I'm very proud of our record in the Ministry of Health Promotion, and I'm very proud—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Prue: I too would like to quote Roy Romanow, because he's your healthy eating conference's keynote speaker today. He told you point-blank, "Government policies and programs must"—and I underline "must"—"play a role in fostering social and economic conditions that support good health."

If you truly accept your mandate to promote good health, then I say help our poorest kids and give them a chance for a healthy start. End the clawback, raise the minimum wage, and then talk about healthy eating.

Minister, how will you help all of our families who deserve and need to eat a healthy diet when you yourself won't give them the money to do it?

Hon. Mr. Watson: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): First of all, let me thank the Ontario Association of Food Banks, which did its report yesterday. I want to also thank all those volunteers involved who are helping to feed those who are in need of that service.

Yes, we've done a lot since we took power and there is a lot more to do and we're going to continue to do it. This problem of child poverty is very, very close to my heart. I think that it is a tragedy and we should all work together to make sure that we correct that. I'm proud to say that all my colleagues around this House, in their own way, with their own ministries, help to solve that problem. We are not there, but we're getting there. This government is the government to help those most vulnerable, especially the children and their parents, and we will continue to do it.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I am referencing standing order 23 and I would ask you to review today's Hansard, comments made by the Minister of Natural Resources, where he indicated with respect to a question from the member related to Caledonia that the policy of the former government resulted in the death of an individual.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): He said that.

Mr. Runciman: He did say that. I would ask you to review Hansard and determine if—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you for that. I will stop the clock. But I would first want to remind members that under standing order 36, oral question period includes points of order and is limited to 60 minutes, so that raising points of order within question period does take some time away from other members to ask questions.

Having said that, the member would also know that it isn't within the purview of the Speaker to review Hansard and make a ruling that he didn't hear at that point. So with that, we will move to the next question.

AIR QUALITY

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. We have been waiting for a very long time for a report on black soot that has been falling on neighbourhoods in Hamilton East. We have been waiting for that report for quite a long time. We understand that report was released today, and this comes just as a second episode—a more recent episode—is being investigated by your ministry. You know how seriously I take this issue. You are well aware of this issue because I have made you well aware of this issue.

What we want to know is, does this report give us the answers and the solutions the people in that neighbourhood need?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): First of all, I want to thank the member for Stoney Creek for the question, but more importantly, for her advocacy on behalf of the community.

As a mom, I absolutely understand the desire of this community to get at something that was a long-rooted problem that has existed for many years with respect to concerns around air quality in that community.

The report that was issued today and released—I said it would be out by the end of November and that document is out today—is the culmination of a great deal of work. Let me just tell you what we have been doing since July to answer the questions being posed by the ministry and by the community. We've been working with the Hamilton Air Monitoring Network, we've been working with McMaster University, we've been working with local industries, we've sampled homes, we've gone in and inspected companies, we've looked at operational logs and activity reports, and we've studied weather patterns. The report released today confirms that the substance is a mixture of carbon black, graphite and iron oxide.

Does it go far enough? No, it does not. I look forward to telling you what more work continues to be done in the Hamilton community to get to these needed answers.

1520

Ms. Mossop: It's nice that we now have a name for this, but that's not actually quite enough.

Interjection.

Ms. Mossop: I'm sorry that the member from Hamilton East finds this so amusing, because the people in her neighbourhood don't find this very funny at all. They're tired. For years and years this stuff has been piling down out of the sky on top of you. We're trying to get to the bottom of it, and I'm trying to get this minister to do her job.

Tell me, what are we doing on the ground for the children, for their parents, for their grandparents, to give

them some reassurance? What are we doing physically down there to help them with this situation?

Interjection.

Ms. Mossop: I need to know those specifics, without the laughter from my friend, my colleague from Hamilton East, who is showing very little concern today for this issue.

Hon. Ms. Broten: The report issued today provides us a pathway to look for more answers. Right now, as we speak—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member for Hamilton East will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker: The member for Hamilton East will come to order.

The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Broten: I can tell you, we will get to the bottom of this.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): When are you going to get to the bottom?

Hon. Ms. Broten: We have eight ministry staff inspecting the—

Interjection.

The Speaker: It's final warning to the member for Hamilton East. Minister.

Hon. Ms. Broten: We have eight ministry staff on the ground in Hamilton continuing to inspect the site and examine fallout from last weekend. We have an air monitoring bus on the site to collect data on the—

Interjection.

The Speaker: I name the member for Hamilton East, Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Horwath was escorted from the chamber.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Minister.

Hon. Ms. Broten: I am pleased to answer this question, because it's an important question to the people of Hamilton. No doubt this question has been raised in this House before, and I've had the chance to talk about what we have been doing with respect to the Ministry of the Environment.

Let me tell you where we are taking today's report. We have eight ministry staff on the site inspecting the fallout. We have an air monitoring bus on the site to collect the data from air emissions, and this is the first time ever that a bus has been deployed to inspect the black particulate. We have sampling trays that residents can use to collect the samples from their homes, and I would ask the community and encourage them to connect with the ministry and ask for a sample tray. We will be having two meetings, one to discuss this report with the community on December 7, and one to bring industry to the table and to put in place a strategy to reduce particulate matter. That will happen on—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

VISITOR

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I ask my colleagues here to welcome today Brian Graham from my riding. He's a member of the Ontario real estate agents' association, who are visiting with us today. I grew up with Brian and am glad to welcome him here today.

PETITIONS

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas prostate specific antigen (PSA) tests are frequently used to screen patients for prostate conditions, including cancer; and

"Whereas there is currently a double standard because men usually pay to have a PSA test as part of a routine medical examination, while women have all cancer screening tests covered by OHIP;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, urge the" McGuinty government "to review its policy on funding" equitably the "PSA testing for men with a view to including this as a service wholly covered by" the OHIP schedule.

I'm pleased to endorse this on behalf of my constituents and present it to Simon.

TUITION

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I've got hundreds and hundreds of names here that I want to read by way of a petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Liberal government cancelled the tuition fee freeze after only two years and approved fee increases of up to 36% over the next four years; and

"Whereas tuition fees in Ontario have increased by more than four times the rate of inflation over the past 15 years; and

"Whereas a majority of Ontarians oppose tuition fee increases and support greater public funding for colleges and universities; and

"Whereas improvements to student financial assistance are undermined by fee increases; and

"Whereas the Ontario government's recent increase to student loan limits is set to push student debt to approximately \$28,000 for a four-year program; and

"Whereas per-student investment in Ontario still lags significantly behind the vast majority of jurisdictions in North America;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to stop tuition fee hikes and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"—reduce tuition fees to 2004 levels for all students in Ontario and implement an immediate tuition fee freeze;

“—increase public funding for post-secondary education to promote access and quality;

“—expand access to financial aid in Ontario, especially for part-time students; and

“—double the number of upfront, need-based grants for Ontario students.”

I support this petition and I'm signing it.

GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I have a petition signed by a number of members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Premiers of Ontario have made enormous contributions over the years in shaping the Ontario of today; and

“Whereas, as a result, the final resting places of the 18 deceased Premiers are among the most historically significant sites in the province, but have yet to be officially recognized; and

“Whereas, were these gravesites to be properly maintained and marked with an historical plaque and a flag of Ontario, these locations would be a source of pride to the communities where these former Premiers lie buried, and provide potential points of interest for visitors;

“Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Enact Bill 25, an act that will preserve the gravesites of the former Premiers of Ontario.”

I certainly support this petition and add my signature.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): On behalf of the people of Nepean-Carleton, to petition the Parliament of Ontario:

“Whereas Longfields and Davidson Heights in south Nepean are some of the fastest-growing communities in Ottawa and Ontario; and

“Whereas the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has voted to authorize the final design phases for a grade 7 to 12 school to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has lifted a three-year moratorium on school closings in order to make way for new educational facilities;

“We, residents of Nepean-Carleton, petition the Parliament of Ontario to ensure that the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board continues with its plans to build a new grade 7 to 12 school no later than autumn of 2008 to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities.”

I'm so proud of this petition and the efforts of the students and parents in my community that I affix my signature and support it wholeheartedly and provide it to Arianne.

CANCER DE LA PROSTATE

M^{me} Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): J'ai une pétition signée par les électeurs dans la circonscription de Nickel Belt.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que le test de dépistage pour le cancer de la prostate n'est pas offert gratuitement aux hommes de la province de l'Ontario;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Que le ministère de la Santé de la province de l'Ontario offre gratuitement le test de dépistage du cancer de la prostate. »

Je suis en accord avec les électeurs et j'ai signé ma signature aussi.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

“Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families.”

I'm proud to sign this and give this to page Colby.

1530

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition sent to me from the Canadian Federation of University Women, Muskoka branch, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

I give this petition to Eshan.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I have a petition from the Canadian Federation of University Women, Ontario Council, from Orillia, from Oshawa and district, and from Scarborough, and it reads:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

I support these petitions.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): This issue of the child care clawback must be a very important one, because I have two petitions to present, and I'll sign both, from the Canadian Federation of University Women in Welland and also one for Milton and district. They read the same:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has" to date "failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

I'll have young Simon, my good friend, take this up to you.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic price levels; and

"Whereas provincial and federal governments have done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

"Whereas provincial tax on gas is 14 cents per litre and federal tax is 10 cents per litre, plus 8% GST; and

"Whereas taxes have a detrimental impact on the economy and are unfair to commuters who rely on vehicles to travel to work" every day; and

"Whereas the province has the power to set the price of gas and has taken responsibility for energy prices in other areas, such as hydro and natural gas; and

"Whereas we call on the province to remove the 14.7-cents-per-litre ... tax and on the federal government to eliminate the 10-cent gas tax, plus 8% GST, which amounts to 30% or more."

This is sent to the Premier of the province of Ontario.

I'm pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

HIGHWAY 417

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas modern highways are the economic lifelines to communities across Ontario and crucial to the growth of Ontario's economy; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been dealing with the planning and design of the extension of Highway 417 for several years; and

"Whereas the previous Conservative government followed through with their commitment to extend Highway 417 to Arnprior; and

"Whereas Highway 417/17 is part of the Trans-Canada Highway system; and

"Whereas local municipal governments, the county of Renfrew and MPP John Yakabuski have continued to press the Liberal government on this issue;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government move as swiftly as possible to approve the extension of Highway 417 through Arnprior to Renfrew and beyond and that this be included in their next five-year plan."

I support this petition and affix my name to it and send it down with Daniel.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario signed by friends and relatives and residents of the Golden Years Nursing Home.

"Whereas the proposed Long-Term Care Homes Act is extremely lengthy and complex and requires full and

extensive parliamentary and public debate and committee hearings throughout the province; and

“Whereas the rigid, pervasive and detailed framework proposed is excessive and will stifle innovation and flexibility in the long-term-care sector; and

“Whereas the additional burden, red tape and punitive measures imposed by the proposed legislation will aggravate and exacerbate the chronic underfunding of the sector, to the detriment of residents of the homes; and

“Whereas the proposed legislation will have serious implications for the viability of the for-profit and not-for-profit, charitable and municipal long-term-care sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We demand that the McGuinty government withdraw the proposed act, or remove the offending sections, and fulfill its commitment by a substantial increase in funding on a multi-year basis in the order of the promised \$6,000 per resident, per year.”

I agree with this petition and affix my name thereto.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the proposed Long-Term Care Homes Act is extremely lengthy and complex and requires full and extensive parliamentary and public debate and committee hearings throughout the province; and

“Whereas the rigid, pervasive and detailed framework proposed is excessive and will stifle innovation and flexibility in the long-term-care sector; and

“Whereas the additional burden, red tape and punitive measures imposed by the proposed legislation will aggravate and exacerbate the chronic underfunding of the sector, to the detriment of residents of the homes; and

“Whereas the proposed legislation will have serious implications for the viability of the for-profit and not-for-profit, charitable and municipal long-term-care sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We demand that the McGuinty government withdraw the proposed act, or remove the offending sections, and fulfill its commitment by a substantial increase in funding on a multi-year basis in the order of the promised \$6,000 per resident, per year.”

And as I’m in agreement, I have affixed my signature.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT -
(LEARNING TO AGE 18), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ÉDUCATION
(APPRENTISSAGE JUSQU'À L'ÂGE
DE 18 ANS)

Ms. Wynne moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning /

Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant l'apprentissage des élèves jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans et l'apprentissage équivalent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bob Delaney): I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I rise in the House today on third reading of legislation that, if passed, would help more students graduate from high school in Ontario, a goal that everyone in this House can agree to support, don't you think? Absolutely.

1540

If passed, the bill would require students to continue learning until the age of 18 or graduation. I think it is notable that 1954 was the last time the school leaving age was adjusted. That's a long time ago. The reason for this action is clear, I think. There are too many students dropping out of school and starting their adult lives with significant financial and social barriers. In fact, the statistics are really heart-wrenching. Studies show us that if a student leaves school before graduation, that person will be four times more likely to spend time in jail, twice as likely to be unemployed, and five times more likely to need income assistance. So I think the argument for putting in place structures, legislation and programs that would help students to stay in school and graduate is absolutely indisputable.

In total, there are about 30,000 16- and 17-year-old students who leave high school each year before they graduate, and unfortunately they put themselves in a deep hole that they then have to climb out of, rather than on a level playing field with the graduates of high school.

The graduation rate stood at 68% in 2003-04 when we were elected, and that is unacceptable. We need to stop presuming it's okay for our students to drop out of school and that there is nothing we can do to motivate them. In short, we are not going to give up on these students. We need them in our schools. Instead, what we need to do is to insist that our students are as well-prepared as possible, and with 21st-century high schools that provide the kinds of programs and incentives that are relevant to students.

Dans l'économie du savoir d'aujourd'hui, il est plus que jamais primordial que les élèves du secondaire reçoivent une éducation de haute qualité et enrichissante qui les préparera pour diverses destinations postsecondaires. De plus en plus, les employeurs recherchent des personnes ayant une formation avancée pour combler des postes de débutant.

Young adults entering this kind of job market without a high school diploma are at a serious disadvantage. In order to turn things around, we took a serious look at the high school system. We sought out top educators in the province and across the country and we looked around the world. We even hired a few of them. This is important, because it is important to note that the ideas we are putting in place come from people who have huge experience—people in academia and people on the front lines. Many of the ideas that we're putting in place come from the teachers in this province who are working in our

schools, know the kinds of programs that work and have been working with students for many years.

What they told us boiled down to this: Respect students as individuals; students do not benefit from a one-size-fits-all education. That's where the phrase "We need to reach every student" has come into play, because we know that every student does not learn like every other student. Students who find value in their high school education are much more focused than students who question the value of what they are learning. They also feel more engaged in learning if they are allowed to match their education with their planned career path.

One of the things I know about young people today is that they are much more aware of their options. One of the things the Internet and the information age have done is allowed young people to have a vastly broader understanding of what goes on in the world and what their options are. They may not know how to get to where they want to go, but they have an idea of where they want to go to.

To quote William Butler Yeats, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." And Plato said, "Do not train a child to learn by force or harshness; but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that they may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each." In other words, we do not ascribe to the empty pail, the empty vessel, philosophy of education. We believe that children bring qualities, affinities and interests with them on which we and the education system must capitalize. That underpins everything we are doing.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I don't believe we have quorum.

The Acting Speaker: Please check if quorum is present.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Todd Decker): Quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Quorum is present. I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Our proposed legislation would do exactly that: It would allow us to further capitalize on the gifts, affinities and attributes that students bring with them. It's that issue of allowing students to mould their educational journey to their own interests, and it would help students to discover for themselves where their passion in life, natural skills and career goals collide.

We're confident that by doing this, we'll raise the graduation rate to 85% by 2010-11. We think, again, that that is a goal, to have 85% of students graduating from high school, that everyone in this House could agree with. Introduced in December 2005, the learning-to-18 bill, Bill 52, if passed, contains several amendments to the Education Act that would help us get there. If passed, the bill would change the school-leaving age to 18 or graduation. As I said before, that hasn't happened in more than 50 years.

The rest of the world certainly has moved on from where we were 50 years ago. I know there are examples of people, such as Albert Einstein, Ed Mirvish and

others, who never finished high school. But that was before the moon landing, before the first home computer and decades before the Internet, e-mail and globalization. So I think it's safe to say that things have changed. The world has sped up. We need our youth not just to maintain the pace but to cross the finish line in front of the pack. We need them to be critical thinkers. We need them to have opportunities that will enrich them and allow them to be fully participating citizens. We would also, in doing this, be among the Canadian pioneers to make the move to age 18 for school leaving. New Brunswick is the only other province that has been bold enough to take this route.

Most importantly, the bill, if passed, would create a framework for more opportunities for learning that takes place outside of the classroom. On that issue, I want to be clear that we understand the central and pivotal nature of classroom learning in our education system. It is where the bulk of the formal learning takes place. This bill would, as I said, provide a framework that would allow for other opportunities that would be referenced to the classroom where the high school teachers are doing their work. At the same time, it would require that these opportunities be approved. Whatever those alternatives, whatever those other opportunities outside the classroom, they would have to be approved by the Minister of Education to ensure quality and relevance.

The proposed bill is about learning to 18. We want to give struggling students a high-quality education in a learning environment that works best for them. We're providing hands-on instruction, we're providing more opportunities for hands-on learning, so that students can discover for themselves the exciting links between classroom learning and the work environment. That cry of, "We need education to be relevant" has been around for many years, but we're actually making that link real. We're actually saying, "We're going to do something about making learning relevant to the students in our high schools."

We heard from one student last year who said, "In my regular high school classes, there were too many students, noise and other distractions for me to focus on my studies, so I ended up dropping out several times. My school then offered me a chance to recover and complete my remaining grade 12 credits through some opportunities at my local college. It was self-directed with more one-on-one help available and now I'm a full-time college student with a high school diploma." That's an example of a student who was able to complete his high school credits and, at the same time, get a taste of what it might be like to go on to college and, in fact, he has been able to do that.

Of course, we'll set out policies and standards for any of these new programs and partnerships. We continue right now to work with the education sector and other partners to ensure that the expanded menu of programs meets our highest standards.

The quality of education would also be maintained through the bill, especially by only allowing principals to

issue credits for learning outside of the classroom. So that link between the school and the learning environment is not being cut. It is principals who will issue the high school credits. That's a key point, and certainly in conversations with the teachers' federations, it's one that we've emphasized. It's a concern they brought to us, and we were very happy that in the amendments we were able to make it clear that that was the intention and that that's what will happen.

1550

Ontario publicly funded education will remain in public hands for the public good. Principals and teachers will remain the backbone of the education system in this province. I think that is certainly what underpins everything we do in this House.

Down the road, the proposed bill would give judges the power to suspend driver's licences of students convicted of truancy, and this would add one more penalty available to the courts. But I think it's important to say—because there's been a lot of discussion about the driver's licence provision, which has been significantly altered—that as it stands now, this would be only a last resort and would only be put into force when high school students have access to a full array of new learning opportunities. So even that last resort that a court would have to remove a driver's licence will only be put into place when there's a full array of learning opportunities around the province.

In addition, the maximum fines for parents and employers would rise to the same level as the fines for students. What this does is it recognizes that adults have an important role to play in supporting young people's continuing learning. Over the years that I've been a parent activist and a trustee and then an MPP, I have heard countless times in meetings on education how it takes a village to raise a child. And so what this provision does is acknowledge that reality, that indeed it does take a village to raise a child and it does take a village to educate a child, and so the adults who are involved need to take some responsibility for the continued learning and keeping those kids in school. However, those penalties will also be delayed until a future date decided by the government.

Of course, those are the formal penalties, but the real penalty to struggling students will not come from any of those proposed new measures but in fact by permitting the continuation of the "can't do any better" attitude, that mentality that says, "That child can't do any better. That child can't graduate from high school." That's what really is the penalty, and we can't accept that.

Ontario expects the government to lead, and this is exactly what we're doing. We would be the second province in the country to raise the school leaving age to 18, and we would be the first Ontario government in over a decade to respect students as individuals and give them an education that matches their personal needs and goals. This proposed bill would be a vital piece in our student success strategy to ensure all high school students can reach their full potential. It would also be a bill created through partnerships with so many individuals and

organizations in the education community, and I want to thank them for their support in helping us to craft this legislation and helping us to craft the programs that we're putting in place.

I'm really very excited about the impact of this bill, the impact that it would have in the lives of countless students across the province. What we're doing is building a stronger, smarter society, and this bill would help us to do that by graduating more students who are prepared to lead in our communities.

Our focus on helping more students graduate is one of the top three priorities, and I've spoken about these many times in the House. We're also focused on helping 75% of grade 6 students achieve the provincial standard in reading, writing and math by 2008, and we're focused on reducing primary class sizes to 20 students or fewer. We're committed to these goals because we know that they will help us reach every student, they will help every student succeed, and they will help this province move forward. All of these goals will stretch the minds of a whole new generation of people in this province.

I'd like to close by quoting Horace Mann. He said, "Education is the great equalizer of the conditions of man"—and I'm sure he would have said "women"—"the balance wheel of the social machinery."

Je suis convaincue qu'en modernisant le système d'éducation publique, nous donnons à chaque enfant la possibilité de grandir, de s'instruire et de se développer pour devenir l'individu qu'il veut être.

That must be our goal, to allow every student to become the person that he or she can to fulfill his or her potential.

Our Premier and I and our caucus share the same vision. We see a publicly funded education system that respects students for who they are and respects them for where they want to go. I strongly believe that this legislation, Bill 52, is going to help us to get to where we need to be to be the strongest province in the country, and with the most educated and most prepared citizenry that we can have.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I was pleased to listen to the minister's remarks and noted, obviously, that they have substantive amendments, some of which will soften the blow of some of the additional language in the bill on the licence suspension and the role of non-certified teachers in the children's learning after the age of 18 in other environments. They've sort of skated around the issues, some of which won't come into force until after the bill is proclaimed and certainly after that period as well. I think that some of the ideas I'm hearing in my riding and probably from Durham College, wishing to form working relationships with the boards of education and then exactly how the money flows, becomes the issue. I know the new president of Durham College, Leah Myers, knows of what she speaks, having worked in the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. I hope the consultations are fruitful there, because it's sort of the bureaucracy of education itself, not to fault the minister

on this, that has been the issue. In fact, I met with the principals' council representatives at Queen's Park today and they had some really troubling concerns about the responsibilities—but with no resources—that are going to be imposed for them to be the guiding hand in these working partnerships with the co-op working experience for creditworthiness.

So I'll be watching carefully as they skate around the very touchy issue that providing dumbed-down credits is not what anyone wants. I know the minister doesn't want them, but certainly quality is the measurement of the success of this, and that is yet to be seen. We need to make sure the children and the young people have the skills to contribute to their own life, indeed to the economy, in their own particular way.

The bill itself is sort of the McGuinty promise, but the deliverables will occur some time after the next election, I suspect.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I need to beg indulgence of the House and I'm going to plead newness of my role. I neglected to indicate that I was going to share my time in the leadoff with my parliamentary assistant. I am asking the indulgence of the House to allow that to happen and then we would revert to questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker: The minister is requesting unanimous consent to—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Agreed.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I appreciate that.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot): I was poring through volume 1 of the historic documents here; so thank you, Minister, for your remarks.

I rise in the House today to basically echo the remarks of our wonderful Minister of Education and her reference to the importance of the proposed "learning to age 18" bill. I would like to take some time this afternoon to explain just how it fits within our overall strategy to help more high school students succeed and indeed work towards their graduation.

Our government is confident that this proposed legislation, along with many other student success initiatives, will move Ontario closer to our graduation rate target of 85% by 2010-11. That would be a significant increase from the 68% figure we saw in 2003-04. So when this target is achieved, 20,000 more students will graduate every year compared to that 2003-04 base.

I'm proud to say that early results show that Ontario schools are getting back on track to make this target, with 71% of students graduating in 2004-05.

Other recent results also demonstrate student achievement is on the rise. The pass rate on the grade 10 literacy test increased from 72% to 84% for English-language students and from 78% to 81% for French-language students between 2002-03 and 2005-06.

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Some 22% more students took co-operative education in 2005-06 compared to 2004-05. That's important. I come from a small place known as Waterdown. My daughter is a recent graduate there; she's at Ryerson now. I could name—I won't, because I can't do that legally here—at least 20 students off the top of my head who are staying in school because of the co-operative education options that are available. That's very good news for all of us, as it demonstrates to us that we are making significant forward progress to reach every student in high school.

A few moments ago, our Minister of Education mentioned that there are initiatives already under way in Ontario's high schools that would complement this proposed legislation. I'd like to highlight six ways our government is helping our teens to graduate.

Our specialist high-skills major programs are currently being piloted across the province. This acknowledges in a very pointed way that not all students learn the same way. This program allows some students to focus their studies on an industry sector, such as agriculture, manufacturing or hospitality. By earning a major, students will be more focused on a career path, and hence better prepared to continue learning to become a leader in their chosen field.

For example, at the district school board of Niagara, 20 students are currently enrolled in the new construction major. One component of the program is building homes with Habitat for Humanity for low-income families. These students are not only doing something tremendously important socially, but they're bringing their classroom knowledge to the construction site and making a real difference in their community. I'm sure members from the Niagara area have seen this and would bear witness to this incredible opportunity and initiative.

At the same time, high school students in Clinton are majoring in agriculture and preparing for agricultural careers, apprenticeships or college technology programs—agriculture, the second-leading industry in Ontario.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron—Bruce): First in Huron—Bruce.

Mr. McMeekin: Especially in Huron—Bruce.

One student from that program told us, "I hope to take over our family farm and I figured that the more information I could learn about the equipment involved, the better."

Another big initiative we have undertaken is creating student success teams in every single high school in Ontario. These teams include a student success teacher, the principal, the guidance department head, the special education department head and certain other appointed staff. This was made possible through a government investment of \$110 million this year to fund 1,600 new high school teachers, and the plan is to fund 300 more next year. In addition, we are funding a student success leader in every school board to help coordinate these efforts. Together, these teams identify and support

students who need extra help to succeed, provide more options for learning and monitor student progress.

The dual credit program is the third way I would like to spotlight. An estimated 2,300 students are now enrolled in 50 pilot programs this year, up from the 14 dual credit programs that ran in 2005-06 for some 361 students. These pilot programs allow high school students to earn a number of credits by participating in apprenticeship training and college courses that count towards their high school diploma, college diploma, college certificate or apprenticeship certification. A student from South Porcupine who took a dual credit last year wrote me these words: "This program has me thinking of my future now, whereas a year ago I didn't know what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go in life.... I feel as if I have more confidence in myself and can accomplish virtually anything that I put my mind to."

Another student said, "When I got picked for the program, I felt special. I was getting attention, not detentions."

Students at risk of dropping out during the move from elementary to secondary school also have the support they need. Earlier this year, we introduced a transition plan that includes more teachers, intensive professional development and improved tracking of struggling students and their progress. It is estimated the plan is already helping some 20,000 students build momentum towards their eventual high school graduation.

Student success lighthouse projects like the one at Waterdown District High School are helping more than 10,000 struggling high school students through increased support, extra guidance or the creation of a different learning environment.

The Ministry of Education has funded 159 projects in 2006-07 through a \$12-million investment. These projects were developed by individual boards to meet the unique challenges faced by their students, schools and communities. Some of these projects provide students with the opportunity to return to a classroom course they failed and receive the additional support they need to complete the remaining work required for the credit. Other projects create links to colleges and workplaces for struggling students who are more engaged in those types of learning environments.

I heard from a principal in northern Ontario who is running a successful lighthouse pilot project for aboriginal students.

By the way, do you know that some 71% of our First Nations or aboriginal young people never finish high school? It's a tragedy. Unless and until we can find ways to correct that terrible situation, what a wasted opportunity. Sorry about that. That's a little off script, but I wanted to share that.

Through our funding and guidance, she, the principal, has built an alternative learning centre featuring more aboriginal literature, music and art. The centre has built self-esteem amongst aboriginal students by honouring and acknowledging their rich culture, bringing it into the school and giving them a real sense of belonging. More

aboriginal students are attending school now and participating in the classroom because they feel the educational system is directly tailored to them.

Finally, I want to mention that two co-op credits earned after September 2005 can now be applied to a student's 18 compulsory credits required for graduation. Previously, students earning co-op credits could only count them towards the 12 non-compulsory credits to complete their 30-credit requirement for the Ontario secondary school diploma.

More students now have access to co-op placements with strong links to classroom subject areas, while benefiting from the knowledge and skills gained through the real-life work environment. This also gives more students a chance to start working and to test-drive their career options.

In total, we will invest \$1.3 billion in our new student success strategy to ensure that we reach every student and help them, in turn, to reach their full potential. I'm very, very proud of these initiatives and our proposed learning-to-18 legislation. They are based on choice and respect. They are also built on partnership and a shared vision.

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Before I finish, I want to take a moment to thank our partners in the education community for working with us to shape the proposed learning-to-18 legislation. In particular, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens have been instrumental in partnering with us to find solutions that work.

Last week, Donna Marie Kennedy, president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, had some very kind words for us, and we like kind words from time to time. We hear a few of them in the House; not as many as we deserve, but from time to time we hear a few kinds words. She said, "This government heard teachers' concerns about maintaining the integrity of the secondary school diploma." The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation thanked us for amending the bill to ensure that "the quality of Ontario's publicly funded education system will be maintained."

Home-schooling parents, who were out in droves at the public hearings, also contributed a great deal of energy to the process, and we thank all of them for that. We believe sincerely that we met the concerns they raised.

I also want to thank the thousands of parents, teachers, principals and other education advocates who have shared their thoughts with us on this proposed bill. Whether it was a comment from a student in Leamington or a teacher in Toronto during these public consultations, everyone made their mark on this proposed legislation. This was certainly a bill created through co-operation, not isolation.

Together, we will make Ontario's publicly funded high school system the very best in the world. Thousands more students will graduate with a more promising future

ahead of them because of this legislation. These young adults will drive our economy for many decades to come.

John F. Kennedy, one of my boyhood heroes, once said, "Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource." Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." A favourite poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, added, "Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation."

As you might imagine, I agree with all of these great people.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Great choices.

Mr. McMeekin: Great choices.

More students earning their high school diploma means more young adults bringing innovation, leadership and motivation to the workplace. They will help us compete on the world stage and they will help this wonderful province of Ontario prosper.

No initiative is more essential to Ontario's economic advantage than this government's plan to ensure our young people keep learning in a classroom, apprenticeship or workplace training program until at least age 18. Ontario won't give up on its youth. Instead, our government will challenge and engage young Ontarians by making their learning more relevant.

I am proud of the hard work our government and our education partners have put into this place and into this bill to ensure that each and every one of our students achieves and becomes all that they can be. Ontario's best investment portfolio is indeed a strong public education system. I'm honoured, in some small way as the parliamentary assistant to a wonderful Minister of Education, to work with a government that gets it and to have the opportunity every single day to try to advance the cause of student success in this great province of ours.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. O'Toole: It was a pleasure to listen to Mr. McMeekin, the member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot, and his comments this afternoon. I hope those aren't his last remarks here, because he did bring some wisdom to the debate. I think he did speak with a great deal of passion and commitment, as all members do.

No student should be left behind; that should certainly be well known. I guess you have to look at the broad horizon in education and education reform. There's an ongoing case study in education and education strategies.

Most people here have served outside prior to their role as an MPP. I personally was on the provincial parent-teacher association, I was a school trustee, and I am a parent of five children. Education is the only vertical mobility tool that we can offer children, so no child should be left behind without opportunity. Without hope, a person might be defined as being dead. So this is a very important bill to get right. That's what's most troubling here: I'm just not sure if they have it right.

I would go back and say that what's important is his quote—I was waiting for the quote from Machiavelli's *The Prince*, because most of what he was saying was written by the scribes in the back room. The few times he was off-script he was very good. The John Kennedy thing was excellent.

Now, being a University of Toronto alumnus, I'm lucky to get a copy of some of their distributions in the mail. This is one that I was reading, on leaders in education: "Carol Rolheiser Reforms Education by Getting Inside of It." It's an excellent article about leaders in education today. She went on to say in this article that one of the places where she's doing a lot of work is the York Region District School Board, where over the past five years she's been talking about making teaching a science. She mentions co-operative learning and co-operative education, which are extremely important—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I just want to say to the citizens watching that it's Wednesday, it's 4:16—4:17 in 30 seconds. At about 4:25, the Conservatives will speak for 20 minutes plus questions, so a half an hour. After that, I have a whole hour to attack the government as vigorously and as passionately as I can, and I will. I want to demolish the elements of this bill. There isn't much, actually, because they took out all the other stuff that—

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Support what you can.

Mr. Marchese: There isn't anything I can support, and that's the problemo.

I want people to tune in at approximately quarter to 5 and listen to what I have to say about this bad bill, because I believe it to be one of the worst things the Liberals have done here; I really do. I have to say that this is something I expected from the Tories, the Conservatives, and when you introduced this before the election and then introduced it as a bill, I was so amazed, shocked and surprised. Six months ago, I even believed that you were not going to introduce this bill. I really did, because the polling showed that they don't agree with what you're doing, by and large. They really believe you should change the programming that we offer in our high school system, our elementary system, as a way to solve some of these educational problems, these social problems, but not this. So tune in in approximately half an hour and you'll hear what I have to say.

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Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I was listening to the Minister of Education speaking about this bill. As well, I was listening to the parliamentary assistant. I know that we have wonderful members: We have a minister and a PA who speak from their hearts, and they believe in this issue. They're not doing it for political reasons but because they believe in student success and they believe in public education, and they believe in this province. The only way we can prosper in this province is by paying attention to our students and investing in our

youth. This is a very important step towards having a prosperous province.

Despite all the negativity, despite all the opposition's talk about this bill, it's a very important step towards increasing the success rate in the province of Ontario. I believe that this measure, which has been taken by our government since we got elected, has proven its success. This step is a great step in the right direction in order to achieve our goal, which is 85% success by 2010-11. It's a very important investment in education. It's a very important investment in public education.

I had the chance to sit in the committee where we were listening to many different stakeholders. Teachers, principals, many people came before us and said many different things. I'm very pleased to see the Minister of Education and our government listening to them and amending the bill in a fashion to address their concerns, because we have one goal, only one goal: to see the success rate go up. We have no desire to cripple our movement, because I believe we're going in the right direction. We're going to do whatever is possible to assist our students, to assist their educations, and to maintain all students in public education.

I want to tell you something: It's a very important bill. That's why I'm going to support it.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I was pleased to hear the presentation or part of the presentation this afternoon from the member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot. This is an important education matter. I was pleased today to have an opportunity to meet with the Ontario Principals' Council along with my colleague the member from York North, in her office. I would commend to every member of this Legislature, including the minister, who is here, this brief that they presented to people today. I thought it was very, very thoughtful. They brought forward many concerns and ideas that certainly appear to be based on putting the interests of students first, which we all would like to see undertaken as an objective of the government, certainly, and of everybody else in the education system.

I think, when they made reference to the issue of loss of instructional time for every student, that's something that the minister would want to take very seriously and consider; when they raise the issue of student safety in elementary schools and secondary schools; the role of the principal as an instructional leader; the issue of class caps in secondary schools and their effect on programming; class caps in elementary schools, where they took issue with the way the government has attempted to cap class sizes. Even though the government promised a hard cap, they have delivered something quite different. They raised the issues of peer review at the Ontario College of Teachers' hearings, private school funding and provincial bargaining—some very interesting ideas that I think ought to be given serious consideration by the government.

The principals play a very important role in our education system as leaders in the schools across the province. I certainly believe that every excellent principal

is worth their weight in gold, because they can create the kind of learning environment that will create the kind of schools that we want and we need and we expect.

So I would like to offer that suggestion to members of the House. I know our member for Oak Ridges was quite pleased with the work that he did on committee on this bill and the effort that he brought forward to seek amendments. I want to congratulate the member for Oak Ridges for the work he does as our critic.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Education has two minutes to respond.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Thanks for the comments from the members who have spoken. I want to just first of all acknowledge the work of my parliamentary assistant, the member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot. He carried this bill on the committee, and he has done terrific work in terms of working with the opposition members, listening to all the delegates who came forward, synthesizing their ideas and bringing forth amendments that have really made this bill stronger. I want to thank him for that. He's a good listener and a wise man, so thank you very much.

The member for Trinity-Spadina, on the other hand, needs to go out and talk to some of the people in our schools. He needs to talk to the folks at Central Tech, which I think is in his riding. He needs to talk to the folks who know that we've had an uptake in co-op programs because students can now count two co-op credits as mandatory credits. He needs to talk to the people in the schools who understand that the programs we're putting in place are indeed the substance of this student success initiative. He needs to talk to the teachers who are very happy that we're putting student success teachers in every one of our high schools so that there are more human resources to help those students at risk to recover credits, to design their programs going forward and to look at the options. He needs to talk to the people who have been engaged in articulation agreements with colleges—I believe there's been one at Central Tech for many years. That is exactly the kind of arrangement we are trying to encourage across the province.

If he talks to those people, he will learn that this is a very popular idea. It resonates with people in our communities who know that students need to graduate from high school. We need to make sure they have the programs that will keep them interested so that we can have every student in this province with a high school diploma going on to the workforce.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Before I begin, I would like to seek unanimous consent to stand down the lead by my colleague Mr. Klees from Oak Ridges.

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Mr. Hudak: Thank you. I appreciate that kind gesture by my colleagues. Mr. Klees looks forward to engaging with his full time on third reading debate as our critic for education. I know Mr. Klees has some very serious

concerns about Bill 52 that he looks forward to bringing to the floor of the assembly.

It's important, as I begin discussion about Bill 52, to describe the environment we find ourselves in in the Legislative Assembly today. As the Speaker knows, today, November 29, 2006, was to be a day of committee hearings on Bill 107. Bill 52 has had committee hearings—we're back at third reading—and I think the committee hearings were quite helpful. I know from listening to my colleague from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot and to the minister herself that they would say the bill was improved through the committee process after second reading.

The concern we have today is that Bill 107, unlike Bill 52, is facing a guillotine motion; that debate has effectively been cut off on a very important piece of legislation impacting on the Human Rights Tribunal. It was rather shocking when we found the Attorney General breaking his word that hearings would continue by abruptly ending them, with very important stakeholders and individuals with a lot to say about the bill completely cut off.

Mr. McMeekin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm so looking forward to the member's comments on this bill. I wonder if he would like to comment on this bill, because it really is important. I know he appreciates the importance of this bill, but I'm in your hands, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I remind the member for Erie–Lincoln that we are not debating Bill 107 today. He should address his comments to the bill under discussion.

Mr. Hudak: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. I was speaking to Bill 107 in the context of Bill 52, which had committee hearings. Colleagues in all three parties would say that Bill 52 was improved because of the committee process. There are a number of provisions which Mr. Klees, our critic, and other members of the Progressive Conservative caucus objected to in Bill 52. I know that my colleague from Trinity–Spadina brought forward his concerns on Bill 52. We did see some changes. I know Mr. Marchese will be speaking a bit later this afternoon.

Mr. Klees and other members of the assembly will have ongoing concerns about Bill 52, but at the very least, committee allowed us to see some improvements from the original version; no one is arguing about that. All I am saying, my colleague, is that I wish Bill 107, a weighty bill itself, had had the same opportunity for extensive committee hearings. I think it would have been improved substantially. Certainly, when you see the former commissioner, Mr. Norton, and the current commissioner, Ms. Hall, and well-known advocates like Mr. Lepofsky criticizing the government's approach on Bill 107, I say, with great regret, that it would have been much better to see—

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The Acting Speaker: Member for Erie–Lincoln, standing order 23(b) directs you to address the topic under discussion in your remarks. I'll remind you again.

Mr. Hudak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your advice. I was merely commenting that I think Bill 52 has seen improvements. There's still a ways to go through the committee process, and it's a pity the same process wasn't followed for another weighty piece of legislation, Bill 107. But I'll get to that more later on.

I do want to note as well that I plan on bringing some comments from a number of sources. Today I had the pleasure of meeting with representatives from the Ontario Principals' Council who have some very important concerns about the handling of education by this minister, I think caused, really, by the actions of the previous minister in an unprecedented intervention in local bargaining.

Mr. O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would ask the Speaker to determine if a quorum is present, please.

The Acting Speaker: I ask the table to see if a quorum is present.

The Clerk-at-the-Table: A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the member for Erie–Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know my colleague from Durham wanted to make sure that a quorum was present. I'm not sure if that's the case, so I would ask you to verify if a quorum is present.

The Acting Speaker: I ask the table again to determine whether a quorum is present.

The Clerk-at-the-Table: A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I remind the member for Erie–Lincoln that a quorum is present. You may continue.

Mr. Hudak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must have miscounted.

My colleague from Peterborough said that he asked a question on behalf of the principals' council. We would call that question today a softball of beach ball proportions. It's important, I guess, and I appreciate the member from Peterborough bringing forward questions, but I had certainly hoped they would actually get to the true matters at hand from the principals, as opposed—and I don't think the member from Peterborough wrote that. I think somebody from the minister's office asked him to read that. Did you write it?

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: You had input into it.

Let me relate some of the concerns of the principals' council, because I know they met with a number of members today who are here in the Assembly. We will recall that Minister Kennedy, at the time, had an extraordinary intervention into the public bargaining process.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): He straightened it out.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague from Peterborough said that he straightened it out. But I think my colleague would admit there have been some significant repercussions because of the minister's intervention.

For example, as my colleague well knows, as part of the standard agreement, the minister, for the first time, has imposed caps on supervisory time for teachers on the

elementary side. The caps initially were 120 minutes, I believe, for a six-day cycle and 100 minutes for a five-day cycle in the first year of the agreement, and then down to 80 minutes in the second year of the agreement. The minister did so without providing any additional funding to help cover the increased costs to the schools.

I know the principals' council would have related to my colleagues opposite on the government side the ramifications of that move. For example, they said that in many elementary schools now, playground equipment is off limits because of a lack of a supervisory presence of teachers or others in the school. It's hard for me to imagine that you would have elementary school children on recess who couldn't access playground equipment, much of which has been raised through some very challenging fundraising by parent councils and supporters of schools.

A second example that was even more disheartening to learn of was that many principals are forced to use educational assistants to cover lunchroom duty, because the caps on teacher supervisory time gives them no other alternative. So picture this: You have an educational assistant who is there to give additional help to special-needs children. The educational assistants are assigned to special-needs children to help them overcome the challenges they face. It's an individual relationship, and it's important to make sure that it's carried out throughout the school day. But when you take the educational assistant away from the child for something that's not really part of their job description, I would say, to supervise the cafeteria, for example, that special-needs child is left without the benefit of the educational assistant. The educational assistant would then have his or her lunch break, and again the special-needs child is left without the benefit of an educational assistant.

Now, I hate to think that the Minister of Education at the time, Mr. Kennedy, went through with this initiative for political purposes. I suggest he's an intelligent individual. He had the benefit of the Ministry of Education and the advice of boards, principals and teachers' unions, who would have told him that these are going to be the impacts of his extraordinary intervention in the collective bargaining system. The Minister of Education at the time, Mr. Kennedy, decided to ignore that advice. As a result, we've seen a significant reduction in supervisory time of students. When you hear about special-needs children not getting the assistance they deserve, paid for by taxpayers, it certainly causes great despair to principals, parents and the teachers in that particular school.

Similarly, on the secondary side we have seen classes that have had to be cancelled because of the cap on on-call and supervisory time. Often for grade 12 students, and perhaps grade 11 students as well, when the teacher is sick and the principal has no wherewithal, because of the caps on supervisory time, to call in a substitute or on-call teacher, the class is cancelled.

So basically what Gerard Kennedy, the then minister, did, I would suggest to raise his own profile as he made a platform to run for the federal Liberal leadership, has

given a very difficult situation to the new minister, Ms. Wynne, when she took over that portfolio. I know we all heard from the principals' council today about Mr. Kennedy effectively downloading on the principals, the individual school, the supervisory duties by capping supervisory time—very strict caps—without providing the resources to assist and to make amends for the lack of supervision or the stealing of educational assistants away from the special-needs children they are there to assist.

The principals' council had a number of other concerns related to the foundation grant, for example, because, as my colleague from Durham indicated, the vast majority of boards, or a significant number of boards at any rate, are in a deficit situation, barely holding on. Because of these unfunded mandates from the Minister of Education to purchase political popularity for himself, the boards are effectively taking from the foundation grant and therefore there are little or no resources available for principals, vice-principals, secretarial support etc.

I suggest that the previous Minister of Education never admitted, never stood in the House, in the assembly, and explained why he was doing this. In fact, I bet he denied that this was the case, though when it comes to somebody who's positioning himself to run for a leadership position versus the principals we heard today, I'm going to take the word of the principals. I hope the current minister is going to be able to solve the situation handed to her by the Minister of Education. Unfortunately, I do not see that solution in Bill 52.

In fact, at a meeting I had just on Friday with representatives of OSSTF from the Grand Erie District School Board, from the Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk area—I represent the Dunnville area in that board. Kelly Morin Currie and Noel Beach, the representatives on behalf of OSSTF Grand Erie board, had some serious concerns about the government's—how should I put it, Mr. Speaker?—jettisoning of the Rozanski report. Dr. Rozanski was hired, consulted broadly—an eminent individual—and gave some very solid recommendations for reinvestments in education and improvements to the funding formula. Mr. Rozanski's report was being initially implemented by Premier Eves. There was a change in government, and the Dalton McGuinty government effectively trashed the Rozanski report—not shelved it, but basically took it and threw it into the wastebasket. As a result—

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague from Kitchener disagrees, but I'm just repeating—

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Rozanski found that you guys had underfunded the system by \$2 billion.

Mr. Hudak: I'm simply repeating to my colleague from Kitchener, who seems to be rather sensitive about this, that the OSSTF representatives had indicated that the government has not followed through with the Rozanski report's recommendations. Basically, they have said there is little or no flexibility in funding in the Grand

Erie board for exceptional circumstances. There is a variety in school sizes, from very small schools to large schools, in the Brantford area, and when it comes to building new schools and finding money in the repair envelope for older schools, sadly, the McGuinty government's failure, in fact its rejection, effectively, of the Rozanski report, has caused significant funding problems in the Grand Erie board. The Niagara public and Catholic boards would make a complaint along the same lines.

So it's obviously very frustrating, when we hear the government trumpeting its policies on Bill 52, when we hear serious concerns from the principals' council here today, when we hear serious concerns from the OSSTF—and I do have a number of letters written to me from constituents objecting to Bill 52 that I hope I have a moment to get to.

But, very importantly, I think we need to remind those who are watching today, those who are following the debate, that while we at least have the opportunity to debate this bill that has gone through committee, Bill 107 remains under the shadow of the guillotine. In fact, today is the last day of that, Mr. Speaker, and so I have no recourse but to move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Hudak has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

I believe the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1642 to 1712.

The Acting Speaker: Will all those in favour rise and remain standing.

Will all those opposed rise and remain standing.

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 10; the nays are 35.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

The member for Erie—Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak: I regret that my colleagues opposite didn't agree with my motion to adjourn the debate. I thought it would demonstrate that members like Mr. Rinaldi from Northumberland would share my concern with the guillotine motion that has forced the committee that's meeting right now to end its hearings on Bill 107.

I mentioned that I had a number of letters from constituents objecting to measures that were contained in Bill 52. I believe the current minister has backpedalled at a rate that would probably cause her to win a sprint on the provision that linked the driver's licence with completing school to the age of 18. Certainly, it was hard to find many who supported that initiative. I think the minister now refers to it as a last resort; nonetheless, I did have a number of constituents who objected to this.

I have a letter from Cheryl Hozjan. Ms. Hozjan, who lives on Highway 56 in Binbrook, Ontario, speaks boastfully about her daughter, as she should: "My 19-year-old daughter has been driving and working since she was 16. In the fall, she plans to attend university to be-

come a music teacher or social worker. She has purchased her own car, pays her insurance and pays for her gas. She has achieved conservatory grade 8 piano and has pursued her interest in literature at home and night school. She loves to read and debate. Right now, she is working full-time as a certified snowboard instructor at Glen Eden. Last summer, she worked at Scott Mission Camp, a camp designed to help the special needs of the underprivileged in Toronto. Last year she completed a college program where she learned outdoor leadership skills. At 16 she spent a month in Peru learning the culture and helping those less fortunate than herself on a missions trip. She was chosen to attend as a leader at a young people's conference designed to help young people become godly leaders. She has been asked to sing on a worship team and diligently seeks to advance herself musically as well as academically.

"Now after stating these facts about my daughter's life I would also like to say she has not attended one day of primary school or high school. But remains an excellent Canadian citizen!

"My concern about Bill 52 is that it may affect my other two children's lives, it may affect my future grandchildren's lives, and generations of young Canadians."

Obviously, Ms. Hozjan's daughter, of whom she's very proud, and justifiably so with that kind of accomplishment as a young woman—there are going to be extraordinary accomplishments by this young women in the times ahead—was home-schooled. I have a significant number of parents who choose—as is their right, and I congratulate them for it—to home-school their children. Of course, there were provisions in Bill 52 that were offensive to parents who choose to home-school their own children. Marcel and Jeanette Otten on Moote Road in St. Ann's, not too far from my home in Wellandport, raise similar concerns: "Bill 52 extends by two years the time allowed to parents to justify themselves to the government, or fear having to justify themselves to the government, for home-schooling their children. This is especially a problem where students may have completed high school early, or want to incorporate apprenticeship or other learning experiences into their later high school years without having to justify it as satisfactory instruction."

There are similar letters from Jeremy and Maria Bout on Rittenhouse Road in Vineland; Carl and Monica Oosterhoff on Yonge Street in Vineland; Derek Lemstra on Chestnut Street in Jordan Station; and Marissa Lemstra on Chestnut Street in Jordan Station. Those are just some of the letters I have. I do regret, though, that the committee does go on under the government's guillotine motion. We find that objectionable, and that's why I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Hudak has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1717 to 1747.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Hudak has moved adjournment of the House.

Will all those in favour of the motion please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed to the motion, please rise and remain standing.

The Deputy Clerk: The ayes are 11; the nays are 33.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

The member for Erie–Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak: I seek unanimous consent to move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? There not being unanimous consent, questions and comments?

Mr. Marchese: I regret to say to the citizens watching this program that I couldn't do my lead today. They'll have to come back next week. That's okay. Next week, whenever that happens, I'll be able to do the whole hour uninterrupted, and that will be good.

I just can't help it. To the member from Erie–Lincoln, I'm not quite sure he heard the minister when the minister said that they consulted—God, I don't know who. They said they looked around the world before they came up with this bill. They looked at the high school curriculum in its totality, more or less, give or take a word. They consulted academia on this, the front lines, and then she said that these ideas came from teachers. For the life of me, I don't know where the academics were in the hearings. For the life of me, I don't know where the teachers were, because I didn't hear teachers saying, "We're just so happy to get this bill in because we know it's going to create stronger, smarter kids, and it will help to build a stronger, smarter society."

Where were they? Where were the academics? Where were these ideas that these people picked up from all over the world where they've done this—except, they say, another province and a few American states that have done it, where there is no measurable difference in terms of academic achievement.

I don't know what experts you consulted and where in the world you went to get this great idea for this bill. But I've got to tell you, I'm looking forward to debating this bill for the whole hour next time we meet so that I can talk a little more about this.

Mr. McMeekin: I'll tell you where they were. The OSSTF has a plan called Putting Students First, and they acknowledge, quite openly, that what the government is doing is, by and large, consistent with their thrust.

There was some reference to OECTA, which came out with a news release that reads:

"Ontario's Catholic teachers are endorsing the McGuinty government's strategy to help students at risk....

"Members of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association ... applaud the plan to match individual students' strengths, interests and career goals...."

Later they said, "The government heard teachers' concerns about maintaining the integrity of the secondary

school diploma. We look forward to working with the government on the details of implementation."

I could read on, but I do want to comment on the member from Erie–Lincoln, because there's always, notwithstanding what he has to say, at least some gem of wisdom; you have to look hard for it sometimes. He talked about safety, and that certainly is a concern. We heard the principals' council when they were in today, and the minister has already met once and has some other meetings set up to talk about that issue. There was no discussion about the Provincial Stability Commission, which is sorting out about 80% of these concerns, and that's something that needs to happen.

Finally, on the driver's licence issue, I want to just say that I was one of those on this side of the House—and there were many—who had some real concerns as I listened to people. I heard from the Ontario Student Trustees' Association, which had some real views on it, and I'm pleased to say that the government listened, as we normally do.

Mr. O'Toole: I would say that the member from Erie–Lincoln made a number of important points on voices for education when he spoke about parents in his riding who wrote to him or e-mailed him, and indeed students who are saying they favour the home school model. That is kind of the fundamental here, that the primary educator is the parent. As the parent of five children, I think it should be an open part of the discussion, without feeling shunned or that somehow that isn't one of the options. If you haven't got that liberty, then you're almost in "father knows best" mode. So I think that choice in education is an important debate. It is controversial because it contradicts OSSTF and others, and I would say that that's problematic.

The member from Trinity–Spadina, in the last 10 years—I know he comes from a school trustee background. He has knowledge and passion on the topic, so I am interested in listening to his comments for the next five minutes. I intend to get a copy of Hansard and pay attention.

But like many members here today, I did meet with members of the Ontario Principals' Council, not specifically Blair Hilts, but a couple of the principals. They did speak to the issues with respect to Bill 52, but they spoke specifically about school safety. We all read in the papers today about school security and who's responsible for that security. If you don't have a safe learning environment, you have jeopardized that learning environment, and the trust that parents place in the principals and teachers is unfair unless they provide the resources. But this bill—quite frankly, there have been a couple of amendments. Some of them are postdated until after the next election.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Mitchell: I'm very pleased to rise this afternoon and support Bill 52, and I do want to make some comments.

There were concerns that had arisen with regard to the driver's licence, and that certainly was an issue from the rural communities. I do want to make special emphasis

that there was an amendment that came forward, and those concerns have been addressed. So it reinforces that we are listening and acting and taking forward the concerns. More specifically, those concerns primarily came from the rural communities, so I'm very pleased to say that those concerns have been addressed.

We talk about, "What do our youth need? What tools do they need to build a strong foundation, to have a successful future?" I especially want to take this time to talk about one of the programs that is available in the most beautiful riding in the province of Ontario, that being Huron-Bruce: the high skills program that is available at one of my local high schools. It is working with our agricultural community and our business community. They all came together, as we do, as many communities do, took that opportunity, and agricultural courses are available in our schools. How could it be more appropriate? We are the leading riding in agricultural product in the province of Ontario, and our agricultural community needs tools to give to our young people that will encourage them to choose that as their career. The future of the agricultural community must remain strong so that we can ensure food safety for all the citizens of Ontario. So when we talk about, "What do we need in communities to give to our youth and what can we do?" this is just another example of meeting those needs.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Erie-Lincoln has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Hudak: I appreciate the comments of my colleagues.

My colleague from Durham had mentioned that we had a number of e-mails and letters, which I wanted to continue reading into the record.

Wilf and Natalie Wikkerink of Ninth Street in St. Catharines wrote to me. They say, "Home-schooling is an excellent means of educating our children. Instead of delegating their responsibility, parents take on the task of educating their children using a variety of excellent programs which are becoming increasingly available. The child is not restricted to learning at the same rate as

[his] classmates, but instead their education is tailored to meet their gifts and needs."

Their concern was that "Bill 52 will restrict some of these benefits of home-schooling. Those children finishing their high school education early will have to justify their apprenticeship or other learning experiences to the government."

Similarly, a letter from Kim Bakker, living in Vine-land, Ontario, in the Niagara Peninsula, of course, who boasts proudly of her 16-year-old son, presently finishing his grade 11 studies, who has now come across a setback in his desire to obtain his G1 licence. He was required to show a student card, which of course he did not have, because he was home-schooled. "Instead we reapplied for a health card to have the required photo ID. Everything seems to be fine, however it is our understanding that if this Bill 52 is passed"—as it was at the time—"that my son who will be 17 when he completes his studies may find it difficult or impossible to get his G2 or even employment without the permission of a board or principal of a local school." Ms. Bakker goes on to express those concerns.

Mrs. Mitchell: All fixed.

Mr. Hudak: Well, the government says it's all fixed, like they're taking credit for it, but it was the work of parents like these individuals and opposition members who brought this forward. As a result, we brought forward the amendments to the bill.

Interjections.

Mr. Hudak: My colleagues across the way don't appreciate this comment, which is unfortunate, that they don't care about home-schooling and decide to heckle about this. We wish they had stood up and fought for Bill 107, however, as well.

The Acting Speaker: It being close to 6 of the clock, this House is recessed until 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1800.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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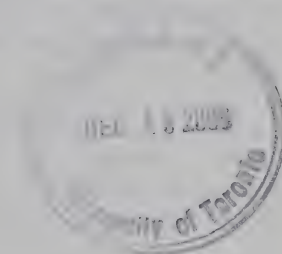
Deuxième session, 38^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 29 November 2006

Mercredi 29 novembre 2006

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 29 November 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 29 novembre 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LONG-TERM CARE HOMES ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LES FOYERS DE SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 24, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 140, An Act respecting long-term care homes / Projet de loi 140, Loi concernant les foyers de soins de longue durée.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I'm very pleased that my caucus has permitted me to be here this evening to debate Bill 140, to participate in this. As you know, our critic Shelley Martel, the member for Nickel Belt, did the lead on this several days ago. She's had a long-time interest in the status of long-term-care homes, long-term-care facilities, seniors' homes here in the province of Ontario, an interest that her caucus colleagues and I'm sure many others in this chamber share with her. Look, at the end of the day, this is where our folks go; this is where our grandfolks go. This is where we go, should we be lucky enough to live that long.

The interesting thing about these long-term-care homes, long-term-care facilities, is that the age of people going into them is older, and one can at least anecdotally and logically presume that the period of time that people spend in them is longer. People are living to older ages. Because of pharmaceuticals and medical technology, people at older ages can keep living longer.

Some of the tragedies—and Mr. Bradley will know this because he visits some of the same long-term-care facilities down in Niagara as I do, whether they're private or public. Some of the shocking experiences are to visit the Alzheimer's wings of these facilities. The remarkable thing about Alzheimer's disease is that it isn't a disease that's exclusive to the very old or even the old. All of us in our constituency offices have worked with families who are caring for a loved one—a parent, a spouse and, from time to time a child, an elderly child—who has Alzheimer's.

First, I want to praise. Down in the Niagara region, we have a system of public long-term-care homes. It was Doug Rapelje who many years ago now acquired

stewardship of Sunset Haven in Welland, which is no longer there; it's been abandoned and the new facility has been built. But Doug Rapelje is one of the leading experts and standard-setters for long-term care in this province and has been acknowledged across this country. We've been very blessed down in Niagara to have had Doug Rapelje stewarding the development of long-term-care facilities—public ones—as well as a regional government that has maintained a strong commitment to public facilities.

I will say that there are some excellent private sector facilities in Niagara—in fact, a recent one that's close to opening in Welland—and there's certainly a need for them, because the public sector is not developing beds quickly enough to accommodate all the demand. The problem, obviously, with the private sector is that it is profit-driven. That, in and of itself, may not be a problem, but it means that fees have to be much higher than they are in the non-profit sector, or, if they're not much higher, the services are much lower and people are put at risk.

1850

The pressure on long-term-care beds is nothing today compared to what it's going to be 10 years from now when Mr. Bradley and I, as baby boomers—he amongst the older baby boomers; myself literally amongst the youngest, the last of the baby boomers. In 10 years' time, 15 years' time, the pressure on long-term-care facilities is going to be enormous. We aren't even close to being prepared in terms of capacity, not by a long shot.

That same pressure, of course, is going to extend into our health care system. One of the sad things is when hospitals are used, effectively, for long-term care because there aren't long-term-care beds available. It's an incredibly expensive proposition. Understaffed hospitals provide less direct attention from time to time—and again, I'm not being critical, because I understand. I've been in the long-term-care portions of our local hospitals. I've seen the staff, just like they do in long-term-care facilities, literally breaking their backs. You see, one of the biggest problems with staff in long-term-care facilities caring for seniors is injuries. Back injuries are common, incredibly common. Workplace pressure with understaffing is incredibly common. I find the staff in these places to be incredibly committed, incredibly professional. Of course, in the private sector they tend to be very modestly paid. Even in the public sector, long-term-care staff are not particularly well paid. So the people, the women and men, aren't in it for the money, so to speak, not by a long

shot. The folks working in long-term care have a real passion about their jobs, a real commitment, and an increasingly higher and higher level of professionalism. The standards of training for staff in long-term-care facilities have increased dramatically over the years. Of course, community colleges as well as universities have participated in that.

New Democrats have for a long time been concerned about the status of our folks and grandfolks in our long-term-care facilities. We have been concerned for a long time about the availability of public non-profit beds because, as I say, in the private sector it's profit-driven, and that's understandable. It's the private sector. But that means the client, the resident, has to be charged not only for the care they receive but also for the profit margin of the operator. That in and of itself is not a criticism; it's just a reality. That's the nature of that particular animal.

The public in Ontario was concerned about the status of their folks and grandfolks in long-term-care facilities during the course of the last government. That's why, no doubt, the Liberals campaigned with promises about long-term care. They made promises. They promised to increase the amount of direct staff contact with residents on a daily basis, to establish clear minimums. Promise broken. Liberals made promises as basic and as fundamental as ensuring that residents would get more than one bath a week. Promise broken.

In our long-term-care homes, our folks and grandfolks are sitting in their own waste. Let me tell you what one long-term-care facility—in this instance, it happens to be a private one in Niagara region—does. I was there. It was a manufacturer of adult incontinent pads that, when they're over 60% saturated, turn purple, and the staff are forbidden to change—these are adult diapers. I'm sorry. I know I'm going to be criticized for that. I'm not supposed to call them that. There but for the grace of God go any of us now, and with some high level of certainty, should we live long enough. Unless the fabric has turned purple, being over 60% saturated, the staff are forbidden to change that diaper. So if you're only a little bit damp, you sit in it, or if there's more solid waste than urine, you sit in it.

Most of us bathe at least once a day. We consider it a norm, a given. Many people bathe twice a day or more a day, if they go to the gym or bicycle to work. For residents, for our folks and our grandfolks, in long-term-care facilities to not have an adequate number—guaranteed—in terms of baths per week is atrocious. I don't necessarily like making the prison analogy, but if you go to the local lock-up, you get to shower every day. Think about it. You go to a long-term-care facility, and hopefully it's not just a sponge bath. If you want anything even close, even remotely close, to daily or every-other-day bathing, you've got to hire private aides or have family who visit with you. One of the problems with that is that families aren't structured the way they historically had been. Increasing numbers of families don't have children; and families that have children, as often as not, their kids are spread out all over North America, all over

the world. They're not there to care for their parents. They're simply not geographically located such that they can do it.

Ms. Martel, our critic, the member for Nickel Belt, has indicated, and I have indicated as House leader in conversations with Mr. Bradley, the government House leader, that this bill is going to require, this bill cries out for, this bill calls out for, this bill demands the issue, insists that the public of Ontario have an opportunity to attend before a tripartite committee, a standing committee of this House, and, first of all, talk about the inadequacy of this bill in terms of establishing—guaranteeing—real, adequate, fair, humane and civilized minimum standards for every resident of every long-term-care facility in every part of this province, from Toronto and other big-city Ontario with dense populations all the way through to the far north with its remote communities and significantly diminished support systems.

It's naive, I put it to you, to talk about long-term care without talking about people living in their own homes as seniors. That means community care, home care. It remains that in our constituency offices, one of the more frequent concerns expressed to our staff and to us are concerns by families about the inadequacy of home care for their folks, for their spouses or for a child. You see, the longer people stay in their own homes, the healthier they remain, the more dignity they retain, and the less expensive it is to care for them. If they stay healthier, it saves the taxpayer money because they don't need hospital treatment, health care treatment. If they stay in their own homes, they don't need a bed in a public or private facility.

1900

This isn't rocket science. This is pretty basic stuff. For the life of me—again, I know the people who work in home care. I was disgusted with this government when they retained, in fact sustained, the so-called competitive bidding by home care providers so that good, committed, professional staff from non-profit organizations like the Victorian Order of Nurses—you know it. Every one of you knows it, because it was an issue in each and every one of your ridings. Some of these organizations, like the VON, Victorian Order of Nurses, the Red Cross, had to disband locally. They were committed to providing that home care. But what happened is that the private sector, for-profit operators, underbid them, knowing that they, the private sector, for-profit operators, once they got their foot in the door, were going to maintain and control a monopoly, because the non-profits were gone. They disappeared; they evaporated. And you know what's going on as well as I do. By and large, the for-profit operators in home care, with lower wages, less trained staff and higher staff turnover, are focusing on the easiest-to-care-for seniors, which means the most dramatically vulnerable seniors get no care. That's what happens. That's what's happening right now.

New Democrats believe that the public of Ontario, the people of this province, the residents of this provincial community, have to have the opportunity, indeed the

right, to speak to this bill, to speak about the inadequacy of the bill and to speak to their concerns regarding long-term care and what they expect this government to do to address those concerns.

I spoke to Mr. Bradley just the other day and indicated, along with Ms. Martel, our health care critic, that maybe some of the long-term-care facilities themselves might be appropriate venues for these committee hearings, because let's not be dismissive of our seniors. Seniors in our long-term-care homes can tell their own stories, I tell you, quite, quite well. So I say to the government that the standing committee that travels with this bill should also be visiting long-term-care facilities in the province of Ontario and hear from the seniors themselves about the inadequacy of bathing, about the inadequacy of personal care, about the inadequacy of the food budgets. Good grief, there's a whole pile of people in this chamber who will spend more on one martini at Bigliardi's than is allowed in the whole daily budget for a senior in a long-term-care facility—a whole lot of them. Do you know that, Speaker? It's incredible how parsimonious people can be in this chamber when it comes to taking care of other folks, but how generous they can be when it comes to taking care of themselves—the undercurrent of a demand to restore a pension plan, a gold-plated pension plan, for MPPs, and the undercurrent of a demand for substantial increases in wages by MPPs. They wouldn't wait a New York minute to give themselves salary increases if they thought they could get away with it in here, but when it comes to a few extra dollars a day to guarantee adequate levels of care for our folks and grandfolks in long-term-care facilities, this government wrings its hands and says, "Oh, we feel your pain." Those folks and our grandfolks don't want you to feel their pain; they want you to deal with their pain. That means making the investments you promised in the last election campaign.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? There being none, further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I'm pleased to rise today to bring forward concerns from seniors and long-term-care providers in my riding, the great riding of Oxford.

On October 3, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care introduced a bill entitled Bill 140, An Act respecting long-term care homes. Concerned caregivers and their families called Bill 140 a "care less act." One of the many promises that the McGuinty Liberals made during the 2003 election was to provide increased funding of \$6,000 and 20 minutes of additional daily care for each long-term-care resident. This bill, of course, does nothing of the kind. Bill 140 breaks that promise to seniors. People have worked hard throughout their lives and now deserve to live in comfort and dignity.

Last Friday I met with representatives of peopleCare nursing home in Tavistock, Maple Manor Nursing Home in Tillsonburg, Oxford Regional Long-Term Care Facility in the great town of Ingersoll, and Caressant Care facilities in Woodstock. These providers of nursing home

service in Oxford were very concerned with Bill 140 and the impact that it would have on their long-term-care facilities.

In their visit to my office, they brought postcards signed by hundreds of my constituents—people who are presently in long-term-care facilities, people who have family in long-term-care facilities and just general community people. I just want to read for the record what the people who signed these postcards wrote, and which they brought to my office on the expectation that I would bring them here to Queen's Park and tell the government how they felt about—

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Is that the "forgotten" campaign?

Mr. Hardeman: Yes. The member from Durham asked about what the campaign is. It says, "The Ontario government has forgotten. Help the government remember." I don't bring these in as a prop, Mr. Speaker. This is strictly based on what the people asked me to bring here to Queen's Park.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll be the judge of that.

Mr. Hardeman: Exactly. Thank you very much, Speaker. I just wanted to explain my position.

The postcard reads, "The recently proposed Long-Term Care Homes Act promises comfort and dignity for all long-term-care residents, but for over 35,000 of them who live in older homes, the promise is empty.

"They will continue to live in three- or four-bed wards and to line up in wheelchairs for crowded dining rooms, uncertain even about the future of their homes in their communities.

"They are the forgotten. Government has no vision or plan for them.

"Instead of a commitment to secure their future and their home, this legislation:

"—limits the operating licence of their home to as little as 10 years, with no answer to their question of what happens next, and

"—makes no commitment to fund the structural renewal of the older (B and C) homes as is being done for new homes and recently rebuilt (D) homes.

"Please ask government to remove the cloud of uncertainty they have placed over these residents, their families and communities by amending the proposed licensing scheme and committing to fund the renewal of older homes now.

"They deserve a commitment and plan now, not 10 years from now."

As I said, well over 300 were presented to me last Friday, and more are arriving in my office each and every day. I think it's very important that we have them on the record and to understand what this bill does to our long-term-care facilities. I read into the record a few moments ago the ones that visited mine.

1910

We will all know in this House that a number of years ago the previous government put a program in place that would supplement the daily fee per resident for D homes that needed to be upgraded to A homes. When that

upgrading was done, the owners of that facility would use the extra money per day to fund the capital cost of that home. As that has moved along, of course, we have the B and the C facilities that need to be upgraded to that same standard as the D homes have been upgraded to, but they have no program in place that will fund that capital expenditure. The extra funding that went into the homes that have presently been built is not extended to a C facility home. Where would the owner of that home now get the financing and the ability to upgrade that home?

Of course, the first thing we would hear from the government is that they should go to the bank and borrow the money to build the upgraded home, but when they go to the bank to arrange for the mortgage, the banker says, "Mr. Operator, how do you intend to pay off the mortgage on this facility?" which we all agree should be provided for our residents. And the operator says, "Well, we'll do our best, but the revenue stream that's presently coming in is all I'm going to have. Furthermore, I'm guaranteed only 10 more years of that and then I have no idea what will happen to this home, because my licence is only for a 10-year period." I think the bank manager would be very quick in saying, "I think maybe you're in the wrong place to get financing for such a venture, because obviously the ability to pay us back is not what we would look for on that type of deal."

Residents who move into a long-term-care home are in need of care, not simply a place to live. Bill 140 puts the emphasis on paperwork and processes, reducing the time focused on caring for residents. And again, that is even extended beyond if the owner of the home actually invests in the capital; that will provide even less money for the care that's presently being provided.

I want to say to everyone here that in the homes I've been in in Oxford county, the care is exemplary and the people who work there work exemplarily hard to try to provide the care that our citizens need. It's the facilities that need the funding to upgrade.

Long-term-care providers in Oxford that I met with expressed many of the same concerns that my colleagues here in the Legislature have been expressing in this House ever since Bill 140 was introduced. Instead of being a plan and a real commitment to improve living standards for seniors, Bill 140 penalizes older long-term-care homes. As I said, they cannot upgrade and they will eventually lose their licence. That means they're also penalizing the residents of their home. It was just pointed out to me that Madge Hall in Centennial Place in Millbrook has great concerns for what her future will look like in the nursing home, because she is in one of these homes that would not get a licence beyond the 10 years.

Even if they do want to upgrade long-term-care homes, they're getting caught in the cycle again, as I mentioned: To upgrade, they need to spread the cost over the long term, and if they can't get a licence for the long term, obviously they can't upgrade. The postcards say that under this legislation those seniors are the forgotten and that the government has no vision or plan for them. It's hard enough for many seniors to move from their homes

into a nursing home. For the government to then create that level of uncertainty is unfair and, in my opinion, unacceptable.

I'm calling on the government to do the right thing and make a long-term-care investment in Ontario's nursing homes so our seniors can live in comfort and security, as they deserve, and to make sure they have the assurances that as long as they need to stay in the home they're presently in, it will be there to provide the care they are entitled to, that we as their offspring have an obligation to provide for them in the years when they need that care.

Again, I urge the government to change the bill in order to provide for security for our seniors in our nursing homes.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 140.

I did have the opportunity last week to speak to a motion by my colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo, Liz Witmer, so some of the stuff that I say will be reiterated from there. That was about her resolution to upgrade the B and C beds across the province of Ontario.

My colleague from Oxford talked about how the previous government upgraded the D beds and put the money into that program so that the homes that were of the lowest standards would be raised to the standards of today.

This government has no program, no plan, for upgrading the B and C beds across the province of Ontario.

As my colleague has stated, when those long-term-care centres go to a financial institution—because they're told, "Just go to a bank, get the money and fix up those beds"—they can't get the money because the licensing provisions under Bill 140 will not give them a licence that is long enough for a bank to be able to say, "Do you know what? This home is actually going to be around in seven, eight, 10 years." The position of the banks is—and their businesses are answerable to shareholders—"We're not going to make an investment that we can't be assured will be a safe investment in the long term." If they don't know that these long-term-care centres are going to be there, they're not going to be too willing to lend the money to allow them to upgrade those beds.

The government, on the one hand, is purporting to be very, very concerned about the welfare of the residents of long-term-care centres with this bill, but in fact the opposite could be the result, because the truth is that the only welfare that the government is concerned about is the electoral welfare of the Liberal Party in 2007. They're trying to wedge people against the long-term-care operators in the province of Ontario, because they're giving them an impossible task. They're saying, "These are the standards. We're raising the standards."

As one of my long-term-care operators has said, "Without question, homes must be held accountable." This is from Ann Aikens from North Renfrew Long-Term Care. "And we support measures that will enhance

standards. The not-for-profit sector has a long history in Ontario of providing quality care in culturally sensitive, resident-centred homes that are strongly supported by their communities. But unless the government provides additional funding, homes will be forced to apply even more of their limited resources to meeting all the new administrative requirements of the act. That means less money will be getting to the bedsides of residents."

Minister Smitherman had a letter to the editor in the *Pembroke Observer* this past week talking about all they've done in long-term-care centres and all the nurses they've hired, blah, blah, blah. I'm told by one of the administrators of a long-term-care centre in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke that the paperwork alone so that the ministry can substantiate that they've hired these nurses requires 100 hours per quarter. If you're giving somebody 100 hours per quarter of additional paperwork simply to satisfy the political goals of the government, that is not doing anything to enhance the care of people in long-term-care centres; that is an attempt to enhance the electoral chances of the Liberal Party.

I've been told by one long-term-care operator in my riding that this is "the worst piece of legislation ever written." That's what she said. I haven't been around since 1867. I've only been here since 2003, so I don't have that much experience on bad, bad, bad pieces of legislation, although I've seen a lot from this government. But this is the opinion of one of my long-term-care operators: "It's the worst piece of legislation ever written." Those were her words to me as I met with a group of long-term-care operators in my riding.

1920

Another one said, "I have never been so discouraged, as someone who provides health care and long-term care to seniors, by a piece of legislation."

They did have some positive things to say. They said that parliamentary assistant Monique Smith, the member from Nipissing, who did a study of the long-term-care centres—

Mr. Kormos: And she's grumpy tonight.

Mr. Yakabuski: She usually is. But she had a report—and do you know what? They talked pretty positively about that report. But when it got time to implement the report, well, Ms. Smith turtled on them. She turtled, because she was every bit—the minister is going to have these new standards, but she wasn't going to give them any additional resources to be able to implement the standards.

I drew an analogy last week about a hockey team that, if you give them all the best hockey players in the world but you only give them six, just enough to fill the ice and put one line out—the goalie and five skaters—they won't win a single game, most likely, and they certainly won't win the Stanley Cup because they'll be burnt out and worn out.

At the time of the Second World War, as Winston Churchill said, "We shall not fail or falter; we shall not weaken or tire.... Give us the tools and we will finish the job." But you know what? You guys don't want to give

our long-term-care centres the tools to finish the job. You want to give them the task of defeating Nazi Germany and oppression and tyranny, but you don't want to give them the tanks and the guns, the soldiers and the planes.

The problem is that this government is so determined to drive a wedge between the residents of long-term care centres and their families and the operators of long-term-care centres that in fact they may harm the residents of long-term-care centres.

Bill Croshaw, who is the chair of the health committee in Renfrew county, said, "We are worried that the bill will result in a reduction in care and services for our residents."

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: Bill Croshaw, the chair of the health committee, Renfrew county.

Some of the things that the long-term-care centre operators have told me—and I share the position of Ms. Aikens, who says, "Absolutely, we need to do everything we can to improve and enhance the standards of care in our long-term-care centres because nobody deserves an increased level of care more than our seniors in those long-term-care centres." But you can't tell them to do the job and then not back it up with some resources.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): Why don't you give them your money from your CDs?

Mr. Yakabuski: They're getting my next one, as a matter of fact.

Ms. Smith: The next one?

Mr. Yakabuski: Yeah. How many CDs have you brought out, Monique? Let's hear you sing. You yelp enough; let's hear you sing.

Interjections.

Mr. Yakabuski: Standards for skin: gone from 24 to 28 skin standards in our long-term-care centres. So any time a resident leaves the long-term-care centre for eight hours or more, they've got to go through a complete skin examination of the entire body by an RN. You know what? That's great. That's wonderful that we've got those standards, but you have to be prepared to back it up with the resources that the long-term-care centres need.

I'm a little fuzzy on this one—

Interjections.

Mr. Yakabuski: Yes, but one of them told me that if they go out and take their people for ice cream or something, and they fail to report—and you've got a group of them and you've taken them out for ice cream and you fail to report exactly—one person might eat the ice cream and one person might not—for each resident, you are guilty of a failed standard under this new act.

Ms. Smith: It's called charting, John.

Mr. Yakabuski: Ms. Smith says it's called charting. She must think we've got 40 people taking these residents out for an ice cream. The fact is, they're working hard in those centres to do something nice for the people, and you know what? People working hard might fail to make a note about an ice cream in a dairy bar.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? There being none, further debate?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I appreciate the opportunity to have a rather brief participation in this debate on very important legislation, Bill 140. I also want to indicate my appreciation of the government House leader's understanding of the importance of this legislation and the need for widespread public consultation. He's a good and understanding fellow, and I want to put that on the record because he probably won't be very happy with me tomorrow. But I think he will appreciate my reasons for being not as co-operative as he is on occasion.

I want to put some comments on the record here. I can't talk about the standards or the quality of nursing homes or nursing home care across the province because I'm not that familiar with it. I haven't served in a responsibility where I would have that kind of exposure. But in my own riding, like most of us, I do have an opportunity to visit nursing homes and look at the quality of care and the character of the people involved: the administration, the folks who are preparing food, the nurses, the assistants and the people who work so hard on the behalf of elderly residents, many of them members of our families.

My own mother is a resident of Wellington House in Prescott, and obviously I visit on a regular basis, even though my mum is suffering from Alzheimer's. But, as we all understand and appreciate, we have to keep in touch with our parents. I have to say how impressed I am, during my regular visits to that place, with the staff, the cleanliness of the place, the caring approach of the staff in that facility. I have to say that that's been my reaction to all of the facilities in my riding that I've had the opportunity to spend time in. I don't think it's a show when the MPP visits; I think this is the real world for most of the people who work in these places. They genuinely care and they want to do a good job.

I think part of the problem is that every barrel has a bad apple or two. We've had a few bad apples in the nursing home sector, and a lot of attention has been focused on those bad apples. I think it was W-Five that did a story a couple of years ago where some family put a hidden camera in the room of a parent and showed that that parent was being treated very badly indeed. Of course, when something like that happens, it reflects on everyone in the system, and I think the government has overreacted to that. Perhaps they feel there's some sort of political opportunity there. I hope that's not the case. I hope their reaction was one of caring and not looking at some political leg up.

The reality is that I had every nursing home in my riding, non-profit and private sector, come in with their concerns about this legislation. They share the view that the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke just expressed, that this legislation is harmful—harmful indeed. I don't think they said that it's the worst piece of legislation that's ever come down the pike, but they think that this is very bad legislation.

I'm going to get a little political here, because I think it reflects a trend within this government that I've com-

mented on and some of my colleagues have commented on in the past: a lack of understanding or appreciation for rural and small-town Ontario. These are facilities—

Interjection.

Mr. Runciman: You can moan over there, because you were one of the architects of this legislation. I'm hearing this from people who are impacted by what you've done. These are people who are genuinely concerned about the future of their facilities in small-town and rural Ontario. If you don't want to recognize that, so be it. You're turning a blind eye to very legitimate concerns; for what reasons, I am not sure, but we could raise those kinds of questions about a lot of initiatives on the part of this government. Bill 107 is the most recent one. Why you've shut off debate on that—again, I don't want to get into that, Mr. Speaker. I know you'll bring me to order.

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I think this is important. When you bring in standards like two baths a week and then do not provide the funding to allow these people to meet those standards, and then you bring in these licensing requirements and send in inspectors to rule on whether they're meeting these enhanced standards—without funding—then they can put their licences in jeopardy. This is what's happening. Of course, if these people want to improve their facilities, if they want to upgrade their facilities, they have to go to a lending institution. The lending institution looks to the requirements you have placed upon them and the jeopardy with respect to licensing, and they say, "We are not going to loan you any money. We're not going to put our cash in jeopardy in this way."

That's another reality I'm hearing from these people in the riding. The nursing home in Kemptville is the third-biggest employer in that municipality. I think they have 200 employees and a budget in the millions of dollars. They are very, very concerned. You look at Hilltop Manor in Merrickville—again, a major employer; the home in Eastons Corners; Carveth Care Centre in Gananoque, an unbelievably fine facility run by an outstanding family that genuinely cares about people and our seniors and providing appropriate and adequate care for them. These are people who are coming to me and saying that this legislation puts their future in jeopardy.

What happens with this legislation is that of course they come in and pull their licence. What they do, then, is transfer the beds. So you transfer the beds out of Leeds–Grenville to Cornwall or to Kingston or to Ottawa—

Mr. Kormos: Maybe Toronto.

Mr. Runciman: Maybe Toronto. That has even been raised as a possibility. It's certainly a possibility under this legislation that they can simply move these beds out of rural small-town Ontario because of the standards they have imposed on the sector without providing adequate funding to enable them to meet the standards. This is the irony of it. This is the irony of it, and we should all be concerned.

I know we get into these political corners and defensive modes because this is government legislation. Some-

body somewhere in the bowels of government determined that this was a good idea without, I think, fully understanding all of the implications.

Again, I reflect on the Toronto-centric mindset. It happens probably to all of us to some degree if we stay around this place long enough. I was talking to one of our own staffers about a question period issue today—I'm not sure if it was on raw milk or what it was on—and he was saying, "You know, I get too focused on what goes on in the city of Toronto, reading the clippings that come to us every day." They're all Toronto-based clippings, essentially.

That happens—certainly the bureaucracy, who are entrenched here, and most of them have been for many years. This government currently is perhaps the most Toronto-dominant government, if you look at the makeup of the cabinet and the executive council. I think close to 50% of the executive council are Toronto-based members. Most of the new members who are from small-town rural Ontario are new people and are, I assume, concerned somewhat about their futures and are not prepared to buck the folks who bring legislation to their caucus meetings and to stand up and say, "Look, Minister, this is wrong. This is wrong. This is going to impact badly. Before you table this, at least let us go back and talk to our people about certain initiatives—without spilling the beans—that you're talking about. Let's get feedback from those people."

But of course that hasn't happened. This legislation is now before us, and hopefully—we have to hope and pray, I guess, in terms of small-town rural Ontario—that, at the end of the day when we go through the extensive public hearings which the government House leader has indicated will occur, we're going to see amendments—

Mr. Kormos: He promised that on Bill 107 too, Bob.

Mr. Runciman: Yes. Let's hope that that sort of situation doesn't develop here. I think it would reflect badly on all of us. I'm going to be optimistic because I think even most of the backbench in the Liberal caucus recognize that this bill should be toured, that people should have an opportunity to be heard—

Mr. Kormos: We've got a lot of work to do on this bill.

Mr. Runciman: Very, very serious and legitimate concerns should be heard. I agree with my colleague that there is a lot of work to do here. Hopefully it will be recognized by the government and this will not be one of those "Blinders on and follow the lead of the minister at all costs."

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? There being none, further debate?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): It's my pleasure today to speak on Bill 140, the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2006. Over the past few weeks, I've spent a great deal of time meeting with long-term-care home representatives in my riding of Cambridge and discussing their concerns with Bill 140.

A couple of weeks ago, I went to St. Luke's Place in Cambridge and met the administrator, Bev Preuss. I also visited Fairview Mennonite Home and met with the administrator, Lois White, and the executive director, Tim Kennel. I also met with residents, family and staff from the Stirling Heights Long-term Care Centre, Hilltop Manor, Riverbend Place, Golden Years and Cambridge Country Manor. Unfortunately, the discussions all came to the same conclusion: that there are serious problems and just concerns with this legislation. The legislation is disappointing, to say the least. The only positive comment I've heard about this legislation is about the whistleblower portion. However, it is also my understanding that many of the homes already have this protection in place.

The McGuinty government has chosen to pay more to feed criminals in Ontario than to feed our seniors. In Ontario, provincial jail inmates are allotted approximately \$10 per day for a food allowance, while our long-term-care homes receive \$5.41 to supply three meals a day to seniors. The \$5.41 for three meals is less than a Big Mac meal for \$6.38 at McDonald's or the Whopper meal for \$6.03 at Burger King. The people in these homes are our mothers and fathers, our grandparents, our aunts and uncles, and they deserve a lot more respect than this.

The new Long-Term Care Homes Act imposes a multitude of new requirements on long-term-care facilities but does not provide the necessary additional funds to carry out the requirements. This simply means that the money to implement the new requirements will have to be taken from other areas, such as the food allowance of \$5.41 per day per resident, which will further aggravate the present problem considerably.

The current situation of our long-term-care homes is unsettling. There are managers, nurses, and housekeeping staff all feeding the residents. What will happen when the new legislation comes into force? Some residents are waiting up to 30 minutes to use the washroom. Their dignity has been lost. There's no reason our homes should be so underfunded and understaffed that residents would have to wait 30 minutes to use a washroom.

At one of the homes in Cambridge there are 35 residents on one floor, 19 of whom have to be physically fed each of the three meals, and there are only three staff members on that floor. I would ask the minister responsible if he knows how long it takes to feed one resident. This is not like you and I going to the cafeteria, grabbing a sandwich and eating on our way to question period. The skill and patience involved in feeding a long-term-care resident is much more extensive, and this cannot be done in five minutes. The staff of the long-term home facilities I visited deserve to be commended for what is an incredible job they do with the limited resources they have. Plain and simple, our homes need more resources. This legislation creates more paperwork for staff and more hoops for staff to jump through, and the end result will be less time spent caring for the residents.

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What a long-term-care home needs is the promised \$6,000 per resident for additional care and they need the promised 20 minutes in additional care, but this legislation does not provide our homes with either. And this is what the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care considers a revolution. This sounds like *déjà vu*. We've gone back in time to 1988, when the Liberal government put a freeze on all buildings of long-term-care facilities. The freeze was not lifted until Progressive Conservatives came to power in 1995. At that time, the severe problem was recognized. As a government, the Progressive Conservative government built 20,000 units and upgraded 16,000 beds, a far cry from this minister's revolution. In three long years this revolutionary minister of long-term care has built 300 beds. This government is making the same mistake the Liberal government made in 1988 by not building new homes.

At Cambridge Memorial Hospital, we have seniors taking up beds while they wait to get into a long-term-care home. A cost for a senior to be in a hospital bed is outrageous when they should be in a long-term-care home. One day or night at the hospital is equivalent to five hip surgeries. Where would the money be better spent—on those surgeries or on a senior who is waiting to get into a long-term-care home? I am not sure where this government's priorities are, but they sure aren't with our health care industry or our seniors.

Stop the government waste and invest in our seniors. This government wasted \$6 million to drop the letter C from OLGC. The McGuinty government wasted an additional \$219,000 to redesign the trillium logo. The McGuinty government spent \$90 million to close or consolidate community care access centres. There you have three examples, with a grand total of \$96,220,000 that could have been spent to invest in our seniors.

Families are being split up because of a lack of beds in long-term-care homes. Husbands and wives are being separated because the homes do not have enough room for both. I met a gentleman who has been married for more than 50 years. He is now in a home in Cambridge and his wife is in a home in Hamilton because they cannot get an additional room in the Cambridge facility. That, members, is despicable.

We have an aging population in Ontario. We have more seniors now than ever before who need a long-term-care facility. Now is not the time to ignore our seniors, and that is what this government, the McGuinty government, has done.

To make matters worse, this government has put long-term-care home licences in jeopardy. Long-term-care homes will not be able to get the necessary financing from banks because they could be construed as a high risk without a secured licence.

This intrusive legislation has given the government more power to be micromanagers. The government now has the right to tell homes what recipe to use and what ladle to scoop the food out with. There are more sanctions on long-term-care homes than in hospitals. There

need to be amendments made to the purported legislation, and hopefully the minister will seek consideration from administrators of long-term-care homes before going ahead with Bill 140. The freeze on buildings must be lifted. The commitment of a \$6,000 increase per resident per year must be met. This bill demands a full hearing across our province. Our parents and grandparents deserve our respect. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? Debate? The member for Durham.

Mr. O'Toole: I've been waiting for this opportunity to comment on Bill 140, to represent the people of my riding and those in long-term-care homes in my riding. I want to get them on the record quickly. I have much to say. I want to first credit Elizabeth Witmer for the work that she's done on this bill, and Karen Sullivan for the work of the Ontario Long Term Care Association, which has brought voice to this issue.

We are talking about our seniors. We're talking about people like myself—I'm over 60—and others who are older than I am, who would be residents of long-term care. The important issue that I think is worth remembering is, these are people's lives. When I look at some of the comments with respect to the 50,000 long-term-care residents, these are their homes, and some of them aren't up to the standards. This bill, Bill 140, that we're discussing tonight, is absolutely putting the industry of profit, not-for-profit and municipally owned industries in jeopardy. It's a serious concern.

I don't say this for selfish reasons, but I want to first put on the record as I'm speaking that before I came into the House I phoned my mother-in-law, Madge Hall—

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): She's a wonderful lady.

Mr. O'Toole: Jeff Leal says she's a wonderful lady. I appreciate that, Jeff; she is. She's in long-term care in one of the newer homes, Centennial Place. It's in Millbrook, Ontario. My wife, Peggy, and I are there every single week. In fact, I spoke to her five or 10 minutes ago, because she's going through the stages that most of us will experience in our lives. So when you're making comments on this bill, you should remember that it's not just the long-term-care association; it's the residents, it's the staff, it's the condition and quality of life that we are enunciating for the people of Ontario.

I've met with all of the long-term-care homes in my area. I want to go through and mention them. First, I would do it in some sequence, Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence. Strathaven Lifecare Centre: the administrator is Patrick Brown, Stella Jackson is the president of the residents' council, and Sharon Courts is the treasurer of the residents' council. They attended the meeting. I had a meeting at each of the long-term-care homes as well as in my constituency office in Bowmanville. Marnwood Lifecare: Tracey Werheid is the administrator there. Support staff were there, and I remember the residents' council was there as well. Fosterbrooke Long-Term Care is one of the homes. Tina Bravos is the administrator, Jessie

Watkins is the residents' council president, and Marjory Caswell is the family council representative.

These people don't have a political agenda. They're genuinely concerned, compassionate people who are caring for their loved ones, as most of us should or will be doing. They aren't into the politics of all this, but when you explain to them the inordinate challenge before the C and B homes—it worries me that half of the existing long-term-care spaces could be in jeopardy.

But in a slightly different tone, there's the Community Nursing Home in Port Perry. The outgoing administrator is Joy Husak; Heather Cooper is the director of care, and she's the interim administrator, I believe; Karen Sansom is the activity director; John Dodds, a wonderful gentleman, is the president of the residents' council; Liz Hobson is the chair of the family council; and there are Eric Timms, Mrs. Murdock, Mary Malloy and Perry Grandel.

I had a wonderful meeting, quite an open meeting—non-political really; just talking. See, they have some A beds that were refurbished under our government, under the 20,000 new long-term-care beds. I contribute to this discussion because Elizabeth Witmer, in a very human way, puts a great voice to the concern. I'd say there are politics involved in it for sure, but she's done a lot of work with the long-term-care associations. She also is probably a caregiver or a person who is concerned about her aging parents.

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This is her opposition day motion resolution. She said that she was calling on the government to commit to a plan of action to invest in upgrading the 35,000 older B- and C-classified long-term-care beds. This is what's happening here: We've got the A beds, which our government—Elizabeth Witmer and others—was involved in, committing over \$2 billion to that. Thirty-five thousand out of 50,000 beds: There are a lot of beds that are in some question, so the long-term-care associations want some stability on the horizon line. What her resolution was calling for—by the way, it was unanimously endorsed. It's a clear example, first of all, that this government's Bill 140 is a bad plan. They have no plan, actually, and that's what's missing here. She also reminded people that in 1998, there was the investment of \$2.1 billion in long-term-care homes, which included 20,000 new long-term-care beds built to the new standard and rebuilding an additional 16,000 of the older D-class beds to meet the new 1998 standard.

Think of it: Some of the homes that these people live in—this is their home—aren't accessible. They don't have the privacy of their own washroom; they're not wheelchair-accessible; there are no bathrooms ensuite. It's incomprehensible and quite frankly unforgivable. Here's a government that's forcing this bill and there's no plan.

I would say that I commend the minister quite frankly and openly here. The work she's done and her compassion and commitment are clear, and our leader, John Tory, would stand clearly on side with that initiative, where she called for action, for a plan for long-term care.

If you look at the demographics of Ontario, including members of this Legislature—I won't mention names because that could be age-inappropriate—this is the ultimate destination for everyone here.

I think of Madge Hall in Centennial Place in Millbrook, Ontario, a wonderful long-term-care facility.

Mr. Leal: Ross Smith, AON.

Mr. O'Toole: Ross Smith and AON in Peterborough. Jeff Leal is mentioning that, and I would concur. They do a great job. The staff there and the compassion level in a community like Millbrook—these people aren't rushing off to pick up their children. It's sort of a rural environment and it's quite friendly. I would say that I would be so lucky as to spend those declining grey years—I don't actually look forward to it.

I want to commend the work that Gerry Martiniuk has done, the MPP for—

Mr. Martiniuk: Cambridge.

Mr. O'Toole: Cambridge, yes. It's simply Cambridge. I thought there was another area involved. He has actually done a lot of work in his area. Most of the members here will bring some personal comment with respect to their long-term care, but it's important to say that the campaign by the Ontario Long Term Care Association—and I give Karen Sullivan and those members a lot of credit in my view for the campaign of attention for our seniors under the term "forgotten." It's tragic to think that we have relegated our seniors—those who defended our country, defended our democracy, raised our children, in fact raised ourselves—to homes where they're no longer receiving appropriate levels of living conditions.

Our House leader, Bob Runciman, our leader, John Tory, and our critic, Elizabeth Witmer, would call on the government to make sure that we have further hearings on this bill. Slow down; get it right. Rome wasn't built in a day.

I think of Lou Rinaldi and his father's passing—and I hope that's not inappropriate—because he said to me earlier that the time he spent in the last days with his parents—and these are the last days of our parents, and the caregivers they actually have in their lives. So we're making a statement on how much value we put on the quality of their life and the conditions they live in.

I would encourage the government to have public hearings, to try to get this right, to address the deficiency in this bill of the B and C homes.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? There being none, further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): It's a pleasure to be able to speak for a moment on Bill 140. In the time I have, I'd like to divide my remarks between the perceived notions that the government has in this bill and how it's being received within the community. Certainly for many people there's a great gap between the bill and its expectations and the realities of the bill and the policy that falls out from it.

Originally, the government had promised during the election that there would be \$6,000 in additional care for every resident in Ontario, and that would also include or

provide for an additional 20 minutes of care. Neither of these initiatives has happened, and neither does this bill provide an opportunity, as a vehicle, to see that happening. So there's a tremendous concern in the community that these promises are not going to be kept.

We also need to understand the context of this bill. As many will recall, when our government came to power in 1995, there had been not one new long-term-care bed in the whole province in 10 years. We knew that as the population aged, as the demographics changed in terms of the number of seniors on an annual basis and certainly by decade, this was a huge challenge for us in the last government. As a result of that need and in response to that need, we recognized this need and created 20,000 new beds in Ontario, but also recognized the fact that there were existing beds that didn't meet modern standards.

There was a considerable amount of research done by the former government to look at what were the best ideal circumstances for long-term care, so a great deal of effort and planning and design work went into creating new standards. Not only were there 20,000 new beds created, but there were also 16,000 beds that were replaced. We created a method of looking at these beds as A, B, C and D beds, and so the idea was to create the 20,000 new beds and to bring up to standard the ones that were the furthest behind, those that had the D classification.

When this government took over, they had what was left in the province in terms of beds that had not been changed, the Bs and the Cs, and that left approximately 36,000 beds in the province that were defined as B or C beds. Quite naturally, when the electorate heard the promises of the current government—the \$6,000, the 20 minutes of additional care—there were some assumptions then that those B and C beds would be upgraded, as had been begun by our government.

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This government also created a seniors' strategy, which, again, implied some commitment to these promises and to those kinds of changes. Unfortunately for our seniors, quite frankly, no changes and no commitment to those promises took place, so what we have instead, and what we're looking at this evening, is this Long-Term Care Homes Act, which is Bill 140. It has provided a very, very different kind of picture than the one that the sector anticipated.

One of the things that's there is that there is more regulation in the homes than in the hospitals, which is kind of an interesting contrast when you look at the acute care that takes place in the hospitals. In fact, there's more regulation in long-term-care facilities.

I should also point out that part of that, around the requirements, is dealt with in part II of this bill. Many have to do with important things, certainly, but in the scheme of the \$6,000, in the scheme of the 20 minutes of personal care, in the scheme of having those beds upgraded—the Bs and the Cs—this seems to pale in contrast to those kinds of priorities.

I'd like to give a couple of examples. One of them is having a mission statement, and there are several that deal with protecting residents from abuse and neglect. Clearly, those are extremely important things, but they seem to dwell on having a written policy and things like that, and certainly in the meetings that I've had with those staff members representing long-term-care facilities in my riding, including staff from Mackenzie Place in Newmarket and River Glen Haven in Sutton, they're far more concerned about two things: the B and C beds, and that there appears to be no course of action to respond to that need to bring them up to speed; and the second is the quite startling inclusion in this bill with regard to the licences and the lifespan of a licence. Staff recognize the challenges that that represents for the businesses and the owners, whether it's a not-for-profit or a for-profit facility. Bank loans and business plans and things like that are in deep jeopardy when you start looking at a lifespan. Of course, for the Bs and Cs, it's significantly less than that 25-year window, and so there's a huge concern amongst the staff, the operators, the residents and the families. I've met with members from all those categories, and they are very, very disappointed and very, very concerned that these fundamental issues of the upgrading of beds and the stability of the long-term-care facilities that their loved ones are in are in fact in some jeopardy.

So it's with some considerable concern that while we are debating this bill, we're talking about the future of the vulnerable and fragile in our community, our own family members, in many cases—and this government has not provided in this bill the kind of surety that I think Ontarians deserve.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? There being none, further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise in the debate on Bill 140 this evening and to convey many of the concerns about this particular piece of legislation that I have heard in my riding of Erie—Lincoln.

I'm very proud of the accomplishments that occurred under the previous government, in which I had the honour of serving, in terms of improving the status of many long-term-care homes across the province of Ontario—in fact, the addition, on top of existing beds, of some 20,000 new beds. That has meant that residents in the old Northland Manor, in the old Albright Manor in Beamsville, in the United Mennonite Home in Vineland, in Dunnville, have always benefited from outstanding, hard-working staff.

I was at Grandview Lodge's reopening of the new facility just a couple of weeks ago, along with my colleague Toby Barrett, the member for Haldimand—Norfolk—Brant. I was pleased to see the same staff continuing on, and their very hard-working and dedicated auxiliary—who make those homes great places with outstanding reputations.

For a long period of time, you had residents, you had hard-working, dedicated staff and you had a very devoted auxiliary in facilities that were tired, that were run down.

Quite frankly, sadly, across the province of Ontario, many of these homes were more like institutions as opposed to actual residences. The previous government raised the standards by rebuilding homes that had that tired look and by adding new homes.

I remember visiting my grandmother as a youth, and my grandmother was, sadly, in the grip of Alzheimer's. I enjoyed seeing my grandmother despite her deteriorating condition at the time, but I always felt a bit of sadness going in the home, because there was always an air of sadness to it. It seemed, during this period of time, years and years ago, like the home was, sadly—it's probably a strong term to use—almost a warehouse. Seniors would be there in the hallways, seniors would be there in large rooms, and they would be sharing washroom facilities and sharing overcrowded common areas. As a youth, my vision of a long-term-care home was as an institution; it was not as a residence.

So it's a great pleasure—and my colleagues in the House feel the same way in their own ridings—to see the improved standards and the far greater home-like environments in places like Grandview and Albright, at the United Mennonite Home, at Northland Manor—Maple Park Lodge in Fort Erie, to name another. I do hope that the current government uses their resources in the long-term-care envelope to continue that process and to continue raising the standards in, perhaps, some of the C-level facilities, moving them up to the new high standards. Shalom Manor in Grimsby—while not in my riding currently, it's in the riding that I hope to represent after the next election, Niagara West—Glanbrook—is another one that similarly benefited from those funds.

I had the great pleasure of visiting Shalom Manor in Grimsby this past Saturday. They had their annual Christmas bazaar and open house. A great breakfast of pancakes, sausages, toast and coffee was served by the hard-working, dedicated auxiliary for five bucks. Also, because of a very supportive greenhouse sector, you could get some pretty good deals on flowers and plants in support of Shalom Manor.

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Mr. Leal: It's not good for your cholesterol.

Mr. Hudak: The member for Peterborough is suggesting that plants are bad for your cholesterol.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I know. But it was all for a good cause: a little bit of cholesterol in exchange for Shalom Manor. But I will share with you, Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues that, despite improved standards, some more funds flowing, and the great camaraderie and Christmas cheer at Shalom Manor this past weekend, there is ongoing concern about some of the issues surrounding Bill 140 and the impact it will likely have on those homes if it is not amended.

Let me read you a copy of a letter from Shalom Manor, dated October 27, 2006, sent to the Honourable George Smitherman, the health minister, by the board of directors:

"While we salute the spirit of the bill"—I think we all support the spirit of a bill that would improve standards and enhance responsibility in long-term-care homes—"we are, however, very concerned about the way in which your government"—Mr. Smitherman's government, the McGuinty government—"proposes to apply the legislation.

"We are worried that the bill will result in a reduction in care and services for our residents. It places great emphasis on the enforcement of standards, and without question, homes must be held accountable. But the bill will require homes to spend a great deal more of their time and resources on compliance and documentation, and unless the government provides additional funding, homes will be forced to apply even more of their limited resources to meeting all the new administrative requirements. That means less money will be getting to the bed-sides of residents."

I know there are discussions currently between the critics and the House leaders about hearings on Bill 140. I know that folks in Niagara and my colleague Mr. Kormos will be pressing as well to hold public hearings in Niagara. I agree with my colleague from Niagara Centre, and we were discussing this earlier on: Why not use one of the long-term-care homes as the site for the consultation in Niagara, and hopefully that will be replicated throughout the province? Certainly the facilities at Shalom Manor would be very suitable for those hearings and give the opportunity for many of the residents, their loved ones, friends and family to participate directly in the hearings. It certainly would make it a lot easier for staff who work there as well to participate during the day and give the view of their hands-on experience and their concerns about Bill 140.

I am volunteering Shalom Manor without asking them about that first, but I do say with great confidence that it's a wonderful home that would make a very suitable location for the Niagara hearings. Grimsby, being on the Hamilton border, would be suitable as well for folks from the Hamilton area to participate. In fact, I'll be visiting either Shalom or Albright in Beamsville on Friday particularly to discuss Bill 140 and get advice for the public hearings ahead. Albright Manor likewise would be a very suitable location for these public hearings. But those at Albright and those at Shalom Manor, or the United Mennonite Home in Vineland, where I had the pleasure of visiting and hosting a Q&A session this past Friday, would share these concerns, as would, I'm sure, the other homes I mentioned.

The Shalom Manor letter goes on to say, "Bill 140 will make directors personally liable for the failure of employees to meet the requirements of the act. As well, directors could conceivably go to jail for such a breach. We are concerned that this may present a significant barrier to recruiting and retaining directors, especially volunteer directors in the not-for-profit sector."

They go on to make the important point, again shared with other homes in the remarks of my colleagues this evening, that while they support initiatives to, so to

speak, weed out the “bad apples” in the sector, “there should also be incentives for good performers.” Homes “should be rewarded in some manner for providing quality care in a safe, secure and caring environment.”

Shalom Manor, a lot like other homes that have expressed concern about this bill, are worried about the fixed-term licensing that the Minister of Health has brought forward. They have a concern about financing expansions, improvements or new homes with fixed-term licences, that if they are able to access resources to finance an expansion or a new home, there will have to be a premium of some substantial level paid if the fixed-term licences have a short shelf life. You would understand, of course, that those who are investing would want to make sure they have an adequate return on their capital, and if you have a short-term time frame, this may have a detrimental impact on the construction of new homes or the expansion of existing homes or improvements.

Shalom Manor makes the further point that, “Fixed-term licensing may also discourage charitable gifts. Donors may be reluctant to give long-term funding through endowments and multi-year commitments to charitable institutions that will now have fixed-term licences, especially in the latter years of those licences.”

I was very pleased to rise in the Legislature this evening to convey some of the concerns about Bill 140 from the homes and from those who work in the sector. I do look forward to public hearings and would definitely roll out the red carpet to help host those hearings in the Niagara Peninsula so they can make Bill 140 a much better bill than it is today.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? There being none, further debate? The deputy government House leader.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): A point of order, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps I could just ask if any other member wishes to speak.

Now, a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I seek unanimous consent, and I hope the Legislature will grant it, to move a motion without notice concerning this evening’s debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Unanimous consent to move a motion without notice concerning this evening’s debate. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I thank my colleagues and you, Speaker, of course.

I move that, notwithstanding standing order 28(h), in the event of a division on the motion for second reading of Bill 140, the division shall be deferred to Tuesday, December 5, 2006, during the period devoted to deferred votes. I’ll give that to the Clerk.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Caplan has moved that, notwithstanding order 28(h), in the event of a division—

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Dispense.

The Deputy Speaker: Dispense? Dispensed.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Smitherman has moved second reading of Bill 140. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Pursuant to the motion we just passed, the division is deferred until Tuesday, December 5.

Orders of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House is adjourned until 10 of the clock, Thursday, November 30.

The House adjourned at 2018.

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of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
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of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 30 November 2006

Jeudi 30 novembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers



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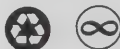
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 30 November 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 30 novembre 2006

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the standing committee on finance and economic affairs should immediately begin an investigation into Ontario's industrial and economic competitiveness to develop an action plan to maintain and expand our domestic and international markets in the coming years.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Arnott has moved private member's notice of motion number 6. Pursuant to standing order number 96, Mr. Arnott, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Arnott: I want to begin my remarks this morning by mentioning the significance of private members' business, our Thursday morning ritual. I believe that our debates on Thursday mornings strengthen our role as private members and, in doing so, enhance our ability to represent our constituents in this Legislature, which is ultimately one of the pillars of our democratic system.

Currently, I have four private member's initiatives before the Legislature: One calls upon the government of Ontario to establish a fund to support the families of first responders such as firefighters, police officers, paramedics and medical personnel who lose their lives in the line of duty. I'm suggesting a benefit of at least \$500,000 to the families of these fallen heroes.

I don't believe we have enough opportunities as private members to debate our initiatives. In my view, once every 18 months or so is just not enough. So I have a second resolution which would have our private members' business begin an hour earlier than we do at present, having it begin at 9 o'clock on Thursday mornings instead of 10. This would increase the number of private members' items we debate and vote upon each Thursday morning from two to three, and it would allow an MPP to have a private member's ballot item every 12 months or so instead of every 18 months or so, a modest reform to make this place more relevant for members.

Also before the House is my Bill 44, which supports double-hatter firefighters who, as all MPPs know, typically are full-time professional firefighters who work for a

city fire department but live in a small town nearby and want to serve their home communities as volunteer firefighters on their days off. There is a need for legislation to allow them to serve as volunteers without the threat of expulsion from their union and the loss of their full-time position. Most every other province across the country has laws which protect double-hatters. I know the McGuinty Liberal government is totally opposed to my bill, but I remain resolute that it is needed for reasons of public safety in rural Ontario, and I know that the respected former fire marshal Bernard Moyle agrees.

For this resolution, I want to start at the beginning, when I first brought forward this initiative more than a year and a half ago, and why I believe that the Legislature's ability and responsibility to address the loss of manufacturing jobs, our economic competitiveness and our economic well-being is represented in what I'm talking about today.

Back in May 2005, I attended two meetings hosted by the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce and came away convinced that Ontario's manufacturers were facing a pending crisis. On that day, we heard from the president and CEO of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, Perrin Beatty. Mr. Beatty was the member of Parliament for our area for many years, and I have known him since I was in high school. Based on his presentation, it became clear to me that there were severe storm clouds on the horizon for workers and their families and something had to be done to get ready to see us through. It became clear to me that without immediate government action, we were going to experience massive job losses in our factories and industries.

In an effort to make a difference, I introduced this resolution on May 31, 2005, and I say again, that was a year and a half ago. I said at the time that we needed a jobs plan because the world wasn't standing still and our manufacturers were facing unprecedented challenges in the global marketplace. I said if we weren't competitive, we would lose jobs. I asked the Legislature to look ahead, recognize what was on the horizon and develop a strategy so that companies, large and small, could expand their markets, create new jobs and protect the jobs we had.

Midway through that summer, Ontario was hit with the news of a 12-month trend showing the province's factory jobs were disappearing in droves. An article in the *Globe and Mail* at that time said that Ontario had put in the weakest performance in the country in terms of sustaining manufacturing jobs. That fall, our leader, John Tory, and other members of our caucus raised the jobs issue in question period on many occasions, and we put

forward two complementary opposition day motions on the problems facing our manufacturers, which were costing us jobs. Our second opposition day motion on jobs, debated last December, was passed by this House with support from members from all three parties.

Despite the warnings, despite the job losses, despite the opposition day motions and the one that was passed by the House, the government has taken few meaningful initiatives and, to date, has ignored my resolution even though it has been on the order paper for a year and a half. I would submit that if the government had taken heed and had assigned the all-party finance committee to study the manufacturing jobs issue and develop an action plan—sending a signal that we understand that there is a competitiveness challenge and we are trying to provide leadership toward solutions—jobs in Ontario could have been saved.

The manufacturing job numbers may go up and down from month to month, but there is absolutely no disputing the fact that we have lost many thousands of manufacturing jobs in the last year and a half. The most recent Statistics Canada report says that the number of manufacturing jobs continued its downward trend last month. According to StatsCan, so far in 2006 there are 83,000 fewer factory workers across Canada, and Ontario has been particularly hard hit. These job numbers are not just numbers; they are people, they are families, they are our neighbours, and they have hit home.

Yesterday, the Kitchener-Waterloo Record reported that the profuse bleeding of manufacturing jobs continues in our area—40 more good-paying manufacturing jobs were lost in the Kitchener portion of my riding of Waterloo-Wellington. The workers of Huron Model and Gauge showed up for work on Tuesday of this week to learn that their jobs were being terminated immediately. In their press release, Huron Model and Gauge pointed to competitive factors, not just the strength of our dollar, but they said, “The continual downward pressure on pricing that has become the norm in the automotive industry has also contributed to an increasingly inhospitable business environment.”

This follows last week’s bad news for 111 workers at Lear Canada in Kitchener, who learned that these jobs would soon be eliminated. This comes on the heels of 700 lost jobs at ThyssenKrupp Budd Canada and 1,100 lost jobs due to the closure of BF Goodrich in recent months. All of these plants are located in the city of Kitchener and in Waterloo-Wellington. At the end of the summer, it was reported layoffs are driving away scores of automotive jobs at Dura Automotive Systems Inc. and Dana Corp., both located in the riding of Perth-Middlesex, next door to Waterloo-Wellington. Other recent factory closures in our area include Imperial Tobacco in Guelph, La-Z-Boy in Waterloo and Glenoit in Elmira, at a cost of many hundreds of jobs. This is where we stand now, amidst dark clouds of uncertainty, with workers and their families wondering how they will replace the good-paying jobs they once had. Our response to these families should not be indifference. Our obligation to these families should be to give them hope.

1010

Recently, I had a brief opportunity to inform Roger Martin of this resolution. Members will know that Roger Martin is the dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto and he is chair of the Ontario Institute of Competitiveness and Prosperity. This institute’s Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress was established in 2001 to stimulate business, government, educational institutions and individuals to increase the pace of innovation and enhance our competitiveness. Central amongst their goals is to increase our standard of living.

Just last week, the task force released its fifth annual report, entitled *Agenda for Our Prosperity*. In this report, Mr. Martin highlighted the fact that even though Ontario has one of the most successful economies in the world, we are not achieving our full potential. He illustrates this by showing how much Ontario’s per capita domestic product has fallen in comparison to our neighbouring jurisdictions over the past two decades. Comparing the province to 14 of our peer jurisdictions in North America, Ontario’s \$6,100 per capita GDP puts our province near the bottom. We’ve slipped from the middle of the pack two decades ago to second to last today. He concludes that Ontario is not meeting its full potential, and clearly the empirical evidence backs up this statement.

Mr. Martin referred to the dwindling strength of our GDP as our prosperity gap, the difference between where we are and where we should be. If we were able to close the prosperity gap, each Ontario family could stand to gain approximately \$8,400 in disposable after-tax income, on average, every year. At the same time, governments would generate many billions of dollars in additional tax revenues, which could be used to retire debt, reduce the tax burden, be spent on health, education, the environment, or some combination of these important public policy goals.

To achieve these objectives and enhance competitiveness, Mr. Martin proposes a multifaceted approach to strengthening our economy. To quote him directly, he says, “We are calling for a shifting of our overall attitude from collective complacency to a shared determination to close the prosperity gap. If party platforms over the past few elections are any guide to public attitudes, it’s clear that issues related to our competitiveness, productivity, and prosperity are not seen as centrally important to the public. We need to raise the volume on these issues.” The task force calls for a shift away from consuming today’s resources and a move towards investing in future prosperity.

My resolution has received support from the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, and I also received letters of support from Perrin Beatty of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, Richard Paton of Canada’s Chemical Producers, and Thomas D’Aquino of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. I’ve also received support from the C.D. Howe Institute, the Employers’ Advocacy Council and the Ontario Real Estate Association. I would ask that members set aside partisan

considerations this morning and carefully consider the points I have made in this debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm pleased to have a few moments to talk about the resolution brought forward by the member, because I come from a community that has seen significant change as a result of the loss of manufacturing jobs in our community. As I was looking through some of the things that I've collected over the last year and a half to two years in my files around what has been happening in my community, I came across this article that was published in the *Hamilton Spectator*. It says, "Back in the days of the P&G families, Stelco families, International Harvester families...; the Hamilton Memory Project." This is a series of articles that the *Spectator* was running to kind of highlight the rich history of Hamilton, and this particular one focused on the role the manufacturing sector has played historically in the city of Hamilton.

I wanted to share with members a couple of key pieces of this article, because I think what these pieces do is set a backdrop for the reality of what communities used to look like and what they are turning out to look like now as we continue to erode, as the member would say, our competitiveness, and as I would say, our good family-sustaining, high-quality-of-life-sustaining jobs in our manufacturing sector.

The first quote that I thought was interesting is this one. It says, "The list of Hamilton's industrial ghosts is long. Some of their hulking shells dot the streetscapes of the core and waterfront. Others have been transformed into museums, office space or even condos."

The article goes on to rely heavily on work done by a gentleman named Rob Kristofferson. He's the coordinator of business history at the Schulich School of Business at York University. He says, "Hamilton is but a shadow of its former industrial self..."

"The city built its reputation as a lunch-bucket town on the backs of craftsmen who opened small shops in the first half of the 19th century to sell products to the agricultural hinterland to the west.

"They made stoves, farm tools, carriages, blown glass, boilers, boats, tobacco, beer and spirits. In the 1860s and 1870s, Hamilton was the sewing machine capital of Canada and soon became one of its biggest textile centres." It goes on to talk about a number of other industries that were based in Hamilton.

"Kristofferson says, 'Hamilton had an "amazingly diverse economy" by the late 19th century. Almost any consumer good needed at the time was made in our own backyard. That was a dramatic shift from the reliance on imported goods'—back in those days—'primarily from England and Scotland—just half a century before.

"Some of those early industrial threads weave through our community today: Stelco formed out of the 19th-century rolling mills at the base of Queen Street; GS Dunn Mustard, John Calder and Company (now Copley Apparel), the *Hamilton Spectator*, Brown Boggs all still breathe today.

"Well-paying, secure jobs at companies like these allowed the city's economy to diversify and thrive," said Kristofferson, who researched Hamilton's industrial past as part of the Made in Hamilton Industrial Trail project in 2000," which was part of the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre, an excellent workers' museum that celebrates the history of working people in the province of Ontario.

I just have one more piece of this article that I wanted to share with members: "You had buoyant, lively communities built around those industries. Take Ottawa and Barton Streets, for instance. What has happened to them since the downturn in the manufacturing sector? They've gone down with it."

"Hamilton is known for steel, but was a pioneer in labour rights, had the first major electric power service for industry in Canada, was once a textile and hosiery power, was headquarters to the largest canning corporation in the British Empire and over the years, had six automobile manufacturers."

Unfortunately, all of that great history is very rapidly, recently, going down the tubes. There are several companies that have recently left Hamilton, closed their doors, moved on or simply closed completely in the area. I go to back to companies like Levis, Rheem Canada, Cameco, Tiercon and Ball Packaging. There are just numbers and numbers of companies that have left our community. Those companies leaving means hundreds of thousands of families having either lost their livelihood completely or having their livelihood reduced significantly, so much so as to not be able to maintain a decent standard of life. The pressure and stress that comes with these job losses is considerable and is something that we should always be considering ourselves. When we talk about strategies to deal with the crisis in our manufacturing sector, the very first strategy that we need to consider, the very first consideration we need to have, is simply an acknowledgment that there's a problem.

I know that my leader, Howard Hampton, has attempted on several occasions to raise this issue, initially having put a motion on job losses some time back, in October 2005. During that discussion, during that raising of the issue, we went through a number of different stakeholders, or participants in the economy, that agreed that there is a crisis. That was over a year ago now. It's over a year ago that we first raised this issue in the Legislature. I can remember at the time talking to some of the industrial leaders in my community. At the time the sale of Dofasco hadn't yet occurred, and a person I know well whom I had met at a fundraiser, Mr. John Pether, who was at the helm at the time, the CEO of that organization, and I talked for some time about the challenges that were facing that industrial giant in our community. There were a number of factors, one of which was the government's wrong-headed direction on Hydro. The reason I wanted to raise that once again is because, in the context of the motion we're debating today, I suspect that if we ever got to a point where this government would admit that there's a problem and started focusing on whether they do it themselves or whether they do it, as this member has suggested, in a kind of an all-party committee to re-

view the issue and come up with some solutions, the bottom line is that organizations like AMPCO, back over a year ago, were critical of the government's Hydro policy.

1020

They stated in a document that they had put together in January 2005, Ontario Industry Position on Electricity Restructuring, that there's an indication here that those large manufacturers of Ontario, the Association of Major—I can't even remember exactly what their acronym stands for, but hopefully before the end of this I will.

Nonetheless, AMPCO says, "Energy policy in Ontario leaves a number of vital questions unanswered. The answers to these questions must be clearly understood and communicated in order to avoid serious ... economic fallout." Lack of informed dialogue on electricity issues is a concern. There is little evidence that stakeholder concerns are being recognized and acted upon, nor does it appear that the full impacts of policy decisions are being communicated to the public.

This is a criticism that was levelled against the government well over a year ago, and unfortunately there's no evidence the government has taken up the mantle and made any efforts at all to respond to the concerns the member raising the motion today has brought forward, the concerns we brought forward well over a year ago, and more recently, the concerns the Association of Major Power Consumers in Ontario, AMPCO, was raising.

In concern and frustration, we raised that motion over a year ago. We have a motion we're debating on the same issues today. You will note that the leader of the New Democratic Party, Howard Hampton, brought a motion not too long ago into this Legislature talking about some kind of solution, some kind of structural way to deal with these companies that are considering leaving Ontario—in fact, to deal with them prior to the final decision to leave.

Of course, members across the way like to laugh and snicker about these kinds of ideas, but I can tell you that the people on this side of the House are getting pretty frustrated by the government's lack of action on the job files and lack of action on the reality that we are losing our industrial manufacturing sector in the province of Ontario. It is, in fact, a sector that is significant to the livelihood and well-being of our diversified economy, of maintaining a diversified economy.

The article I quoted from the Hamilton Spectator at the beginning of my remarks outlined in a very nice way just from a city perspective what that manufacturing base means in terms of the ability to have a diversified economy. That is exactly the same kind of system or relationship that a strong manufacturing base has to maintain for the province of Ontario: a provincial economy that is diversified and robust. Unfortunately, for some reason, the Liberal McGuinty government is prepared to watch 136,000 jobs walk out of Ontario. From all accounts, it looks like they're prepared to continue to have a laissez-faire attitude about this crisis in manufacturing.

I'm not sure if my friend would like to speak to this issue herself, so perhaps what I'll do is wrap up in a few minutes by simply reflecting on what it means when these good jobs are lost from communities.

Hamilton used to be a very well off community in terms of its economy, its residents and the wealth that not only was generated but was keeping its economy going. We are now equal to Toronto in terms of our poverty rates. We have significant homelessness problems. We have child poverty: One in five children is living in poverty in the city of Hamilton. We have a significant downturn in our industrial base, as I've already noted. Thousands upon thousands of jobs have been lost, and the jobs that are coming to our community are simply not ones that sustain a good quality of life for families. So we see increased use of food banks to a startling degree. We see families now living homeless in the streets of Hamilton. We see seniors living in poverty.

We have a significant problem, and it's casting a very negative pall on our city. Our frustration is that there's not very much of a sign that the provincial government is going to take a proactive role in helping cities like Hamilton maintain the glory of their past and maintain a good, strong economy that keeps families living with a decent quality of life and not having to rely on food banks or, even worse, ending up on the streets.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): If the member for Waterloo-Wellington has a detractor in this Legislature, then I have never met this individual. Indeed, the member is a thoughtful, hard-working and effective member. His resolution reflects his desire for a better Ontario. It's not loaded with emotive language. Who can dispute its objective to "maintain and expand our domestic and international markets in the coming years"?

The temptation might be to say, "Oh, yeah, when you guys were in government, you sold highways, ran up \$30 billion in debt, neglected every type of public infrastructure and picked a fight with education, health care and everyone else who wanted to help build Ontario"—and the list can go on. But while all of that is true, it's not the type of thoughtful response that this resolution deserves.

Is Ontario competitive? The resolution suggests that the member isn't so sure we are, so I asked my staff to look up some numbers for me. Other than fishing and oil and gas extraction, Ontario dominates every sector within Canada, from tourism to arts and culture, through heavy manufacturing and high technology. Alberta's principal fear is that oil prices will stabilize below about US\$50 per barrel. At that point, three of Alberta's MLAs told me last year, Alberta would likely be looking at budget cutbacks.

Ontario has one renewable resource in abundance that no other province has: some 13 million people, with the education infrastructure to turn those people into educated risk-takers, astute managers, skilled professionals and tradespeople, dedicated service workers, and so on and so on. Alberta's principal resource is thick black glop that can be turned into petrochemical products. Ontario's

principal resource is organized and educated brain power. Ontario is where the rest of the world aspires to be.

We looked at the leading jurisdictions in the United States. The Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that manufacturing employment in the USA peaked in the late 1970s at just under 20 million jobs. It crashed with the recessions of the early 1980s and fluctuated between 17 million and 18 million jobs from about 1982 to around 1999. After that, its trend has been a sharp downward plunge to less than 14 million jobs, a level last seen in the United States in the early 1950s, when America's population was just more than half of what it is today. Is America competitive? Would the member's investigation turn up anything in Ontario not seen in the industrial heartland of the United States? Likely not.

Set against the American experience, Ontario looks like a pretty good place to set up a manufacturing business. Would the member's proposed investigation yield anything more profound than can be found in the writings of management theorists like Peter Drucker, Michael Porter, Robert Heilbroner, Alvin Toffler and John Naisbitt? I suspect not. I pulled out some of their books last night and I skimmed through them. All of them, in the last 35 years, foresaw and predicted more or less what has occurred in manufacturing in North America and western Europe since the closed societies of the East opened, with the cheap labour to do the long production runs in manufacturing. In his conclusion to *Megatrends 2000*, written in the late 1980s and published in 1990, management guru John Naisbitt said, referring to manufacturing, "Less-developed countries, where labour is cheaper, become more attractive areas for that investment."

One may well ask, why does anybody manufacture anything in North America anymore? Because you send your intellectual property overseas at your gravest peril. Because where value-added service and one-of-a-kind manufacturing—such as is done, for example, at Mold-Masters in the member's own riding—are important, then you need to be close to your customers. Your product and service bundle has to have value that can't be done in mass production. Because culture still means something, as companies like Enersource will tell you, having outsourced some customer support and then brought it back because their customers wanted to speak to Canadians who understand a problem their way.

1030

Our currency, our Canadian dollar, has performed well in comparison to the US dollar and even against the euro, the pound, the yen and the rand. That's a challenge, because if an Ontario company just stands still, they'll become uncompetitive. But most of our trade is with the USA, where just plain stupid federal government economic policy has caused the US dollar to tank against every other major world currency. In 2000, the US was looking at a 10-year accumulated budget surplus of \$4 trillion. Now, today, some six years later, they're looking at a \$6-trillion deficit over that same 10-year forward period. Where, America must ask its leaders, has \$10 trillion gone? That's 200 times the fortune of Bill Gates.

The rest of the world doesn't depend on the US market to the extent that we do. Combine a business slump and a skidding dollar in the United States, and Ontario companies that depend on that US buyer are going to hurt. We don't need an investigation to tell us that.

Ontario's strategy is no secret: Back your winners, as we've done in the auto industry. Be where your customers are—and our Premier has gone to China and soon will go to India and Pakistan. We're opening trade offices in major consumer capitals in the world's expanding markets. Build an infrastructure that business can depend on and give them a competitive advantage. That's what Ontario is doing in education at all levels, with electricity and roads and with our world-class public health system. Be competitive with taxes. That's why Toronto and Ottawa are the two lowest-cost jurisdictions among major metropolitan areas in North America. That's why total business costs, including taxes, have stayed lower in Ontario than in the Great Lakes states, Massachusetts, California and Florida. Nobody is saying that competitiveness will ever be easy—any company will tell you that—but the winning industries of the 21st century are coming to Ontario, and for all the right reasons: the right strategy, the right execution of the right plan and the right government at the right time and in the right place.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise in support of my colleague the member for Waterloo-Wellington, Mr. Arnott, and his very important and thoughtful resolution here today. As we heard from the member for Waterloo-Wellington, he actually brought this forward to the assembly in a similar form more than a year ago. In fact, his forward thinking impressed our leader, John Tory, who brought forward a similar motion on behalf of the official opposition, which I was very pleased to say passed here in the Legislative Assembly on December 8, 2005, based largely on the work Ted had already done in his May 31 resolution. But despite the fact that Ted brought this forward over a year ago—a motion actually passed here in the assembly for a jobs plan—the Dalton McGuinty government continues to look the other way as well-paying manufacturing jobs flee the province of Ontario.

I hope that during debate today, I will hear some government members at least admit that there is a significant, if not massive, problem faced by the manufacturing sector today in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. The forest industry is in a crisis like it has never seen before, with some 4,000-plus jobs leaving the forest industry sector, which affects particularly small-town Ontario, northern Ontario, and Cornwall in eastern Ontario. We still can see a bleeding of jobs from those sectors having a devastating impact on those small and northern communities.

I find it rather disquieting that many members of the government side tend to have this Pollyanna attitude that all is well and good and we're in the time of wine and roses in Ontario, when their jobs record has been absolutely dismal when it comes to creating private sector jobs. In fact, from 2004 to 2006, we have seen a mere 1% growth in private sector jobs in Dalton McGuinty's On-

tario. We have seen in that two-year time some 140,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs leave the province.

When the government boasts about its 250,000 or so new jobs, which it claims credit for creating, we can't forget that approximately half of those jobs are government jobs, masking the true decline in the manufacturing sector and the extremely lacklustre performance of the private sector economy. That's simply an unsustainable strategy. Hiring more and more bureaucrats may pad your job numbers, so you try to fool people that the economy is doing well, but unless you have a strong, robust private sector creating jobs and wealth and investing in Ontario, you can't afford to pay for high-quality health care or education or transportation or police services.

Some members are even worse than Pollyanna. A colleague, Tony Wong, who was the member for Markham—I couldn't believe he said this when he was parliamentary assistant to the Premier: "What they (Ontario communities)"—that are losing jobs—"should do is look for new ways to create jobs to develop their economy and not just come as crying babies to the province." And what did Dalton McGuinty do about that? He looked the other way. Mr. Wong continued to serve as his parliamentary assistant, which was absolutely shocking. With that kind of callous comment, Mr. Wong continued to serve in that role.

"In November, McGuinty described the loss of 3,600 General Motors jobs as 'a little bit of a contraction,'" Toronto Star, January 2, 2006.

"Liberal MPP Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington) said the fact Imperial Tobacco in Guelph was closing its doors and throwing 550 people out of work proved to her the government's anti-smoking legislation 'is working,'" December 9, 2005. Five hundred and fifty families are now without jobs and the member is applauding that result.

I know I have many colleagues who want to speak to this resolution today. I say kudos to Mr. Arnott for championing the importance of this issue. Ontario has always been the economic engine of Canada, and its bread and butter has been the manufacturing sector. In Dalton McGuinty's Ontario we have fallen from that to a very lacklustre, if not behind-the-pack, performance in both sectors.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): It's my pleasure to speak to this motion. Of course, as New Democrats, we would support it. You heard my colleague Andrea Horwath speak about some of the motions that we've put forward, that our leader Howard Hampton has talked about, including the creation of a jobs commissioner who would actually address this problem directly and come up with a solution, one would hope.

I can speak about what the current state of the economy is in my particular section, and that's Parkdale–High Park, and certainly in downtown Toronto. I can tell you that in downtown Toronto what has happened to the manufacturing base is that there is none. The manufacturing companies that used to exist in downtown Toronto are—guess what?—loft apartments. We have the Candy Factory loft apartment; the old GE building is now a loft

apartment. We have apartments going in where manufacturing once was.

I did want to comment a little bit on my colleague from Mississauga West's comments. For one thing, when he said arts and culture, my ears kind of pricked up because it's one of my portfolios. I can tell you that an artist in downtown Toronto—we have many in my riding—makes an average of \$26,000 a year. They live at the poverty level. Yes, there are occasionally dribs and drabs of money that go into the arts but never for the artists. We're still waiting for status-of-the-artist legislation. So there's one community that's very hard hit.

He talked about the changing face of business. I would love to have those comments addressed to one of those workers who lost their job in the forestry sector or the mining sector. I wonder what words of comfort those would be, to know that they're part of a global economy: "Oh, so sorry, the manufacturing role in the world is changing and, oops, sorry, you're the loser." I wonder if those are really words of comfort to someone with a family who has just lost their job and wonders how to pay their mortgage or their rent. I don't think so.

You heard about the rising poverty rates, and that's certainly true. Also, he talked about small business. Certainly, I've been in touch with TABIA members in Toronto. Small business isn't thriving in this city. I don't know who he's been talking to. Small business has had to shoulder disproportionately high property tax rates in downtown Toronto and other places. They're losing their businesses. Certainly where my constituency office is on Dundas Street West, you can look down the street and see empty storefronts. This is the Toronto of present times and this is the Ontario of the present. This is the real world. This is not the world of global economists and multinationals; this is the world of Ontario, the world in which we live, the world in which poverty threatens, and it doesn't have to be that way. We have examples globally, for example Ireland, where they have a 4% poverty rate, where they've done it by raising the minimum wage, where they've done it by building housing, and they're an economic marvel of turnaround. We could do it with some planning, and that's what we need. So I certainly support this motion.

1040

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): I'm pleased to stand up and speak to the motion brought by the member from Waterloo–Wellington.

I was listening carefully to his resolution and to the many members of this House who spoke in detail about this issue. I agree that we have some kind of problem, not just in the province of Ontario but in the whole nation—as a matter of fact, globally—especially when we have a high dollar in Canada, when we have a shift in the economy in Canada and when we have a shift in economy globally. It's a very important issue to talk about, because we value the businesses in the province of Ontario. We value every business, whether it's small or large, small-paying jobs or high-paying jobs.

As a matter of fact, I would like to support this resolution, but I don't see any need to support it, because

he doesn't have to have investigations, we don't have to have a committee to study this issue. We have a government and a minister working very hard on a daily basis to maintain the jobs we have in Ontario, to create more jobs, to attract more jobs and to invest in the economy to maintain the high-paying jobs.

Since we got elected, our government has attracted a lot of auto industry jobs, which are high-paying jobs. Our investment in the auto industry put Ontario as the number one jurisdiction on Earth in the auto industry. Our investment to maintain our infrastructure makes it easier for all the companies that want to open in Ontario. Investment in education and higher secondary education—universities, elementary schools and high schools—all this to build infrastructure to maintain and create skilled workers in the province of Ontario.

I want to tell you something very important. The member from Waterloo–Wellington can make an appointment with the minister, and she can explain what we're doing to maintain the good-paying jobs in Ontario, what we're doing to maintain and attract the jobs to Ontario. I guess we are the number one jurisdiction on the whole Earth, by investing in the economy, by opening many spots and planning many trips to many different nations, like the last trip to China when we were able to sign a more than \$13-billion contract, and also the trip which is being planned by the Premier and many different business people in the province of Ontario to go to Pakistan and India to deal with a lot of things: to talk about education, to talk about health, to talk about innovation and research, to attract more business to Ontario. All these initiatives play a pivotal role to maintain our high economic prosperity in the province of Ontario.

As I mentioned in the beginning, I'd love to support the resolution, but I don't see why we have to support it. I don't see a need to support it. But, you know what? If he has some kind of concern, if he doesn't understand what we're doing, it's simple: He can call the minister, he can call the government, and we'll update him on our strategy and on our plan for the future. It's simple.

He can go to all the people in the province of Ontario to see and notice our investment. It's simple. He can see the infrastructure when driving on the 401 toward Windsor. Or when he goes to visit Woodstock, he'll see the Toyota plant or the Hino plant being built. He can go to Oakville and see our investment in the auto industry there. He can go to GM, to Kingston, to Belleville; he can go to the north where we've invested in the diamond industry. He can go to the north where we invested back in the forest industry. These are all initiatives to maintain the jobs, not in one sector, not in one corner of the province; to make it a level plane in the whole province of Ontario—the north, the west, the east and the centre—because every community is important to us and because we believe strongly that we cannot do it just in Toronto and we cannot do it just in London and Windsor. We all have to work together. We have to invest in every corner of the province to create a prosperous economy, an economy working together, from manufacturing to industry to universities to the auto industry. All of us have to

work together to maintain our prosperity. Thank you for giving me a chance to speak.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm very pleased to be able to take part in this debate this morning and support the resolution of my seatmate and colleague, the member from Waterloo–Wellington.

There are a couple of things I wanted to put on the record here today. The one is that, of course, something has to be done. I mean, we've lost, we know, at least 100,000 manufacturing jobs in the last year. Those are very, very valuable jobs to our economy, and there's no question that the government has to show some leadership in this area. I think the problem, one of the key things I see, is that when people think of a Liberal government, they think of a government that is anti-business; they don't want to support the economy. That's just a stigma that is attached to that party. So you talk to people in the manufacturing industry and they're not too excited about being here in the province of Ontario under the leadership of Dalton McGuinty as we proceed in the future.

I'll give you a good example. In the small community I live in, we have a manufacturer, a company that manufactured stainless steel sinks since the late 1950s, when they set up there. It was called at one time Taman Industries. They even survived a fire. The fire destroyed the building and they built a brand new building. This building would have been built approximately 20 years ago now. But they've stayed with that small community. They've employed probably 100 people in the Coldwater, Waubesa and Victoria Harbour area of my riding. These people have had jobs there for the last 40, 50 years. Well, we just found out recently that what is happening is that the plant is closing. They're going to go right down that highway, past Windsor, the community where we're spending \$400 million on a casino that we really don't need. Those jobs are going right out of our country, right down to the United States of America, because where they're going, there are more incentives and they can survive there. I find that appalling, that a company would leave this province and go there, and most of it is because of the lack of leadership here, the fact that we don't have any—the stigma that the government would leave everybody feeling is that companies aren't wanted here. The red tape is getting worse by the day; it doesn't matter what kind of business you're in. That's what you hear from business people across this province. As a result, jobs are lost; very, very valuable manufacturing jobs are lost.

I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words here this morning, and I thank my colleague for bringing this forward. It shows the leadership he is showing in his community.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): It gives me pleasure to rise this morning to participate in this debate on the resolution by the member from Waterloo–Wellington.

I'd like to preface my comments this morning—I've never done this before and I hope I'm not out of order,

but I do know that a very special person in my life is watching this debate. She watches every day, actually, and I sometimes wonder why: my mother, who 55 years ago today was giving birth to her second daughter, her fifth child of 12.

Mother, I know this is a big day for you because it's St. Andrew's Day. She was from St. Andrews West—her first address. I always wanted to do this. I know she's sitting in her living room, watching. It's a pleasure to get up and speak today.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Jim, did she get that tie for you, that beautiful—

Mr. Brownell: Well, she told me that I had to wear that today.

This debate today is an important one. It's a chance for our government to participate in the debate and to indicate that we have already done much in this province to strengthen the economy and build on opportunity.

The member from Erie—Lincoln mentioned Cornwall in his comments a few moments ago. I want to say that, yes, Cornwall has had some economic problems in the past year. Cornwall has had economic problems for a long time with regard to the textile industry. Back in the 1940s and early 1950s, we had Canada Cotton shut down. Fortunately, those buildings are now being rejuvenated into other opportunities. Then we had Courtaulds Ltd. and Domtar this year. But, you know, we build in Cornwall and in eastern Ontario on what we have. In our agricultural sector, we build on research and innovation. I've seen that happen in my riding, where farmers are building on that and getting the newest technology in their operations. Marimac industries from Cornwall—they're not moving; they're expanding in my riding. They have a manufacturing company in Cornwall. They're expanding into Iroquois, a part of my riding that has had some severe economic problems this past year. But 250 jobs are being created with Marimac industries in Iroquois, and that's exciting news.

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They're building because they know of the position of that area, they know of its position in the world, and they know of the position of our government in building on opportunities. Certainly this government, with the establishment of four new international marketing centres in London, New Delhi, Tokyo and Los Angeles, and with seven offices now in world, and more coming, is expressing to the world that we're open for business and we want to expand those business opportunities.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the Premier himself have gone on a number of missions around the world, to China and Japan—China in November 2005, Japan in June 2006—and there's an upcoming visit to India and Pakistan, to promote those opportunities, to indicate and focus on sectors that are critical to Ontario's prosperity, including research and innovation, financial services, education and cultural industries.

If I could just take a moment to look in my own riding at Pat Finucan from St. Lawrence College and Mayor

Phil Poirier, who went over to China this past year to build on education opportunities, to have a chance to express to business people in China opportunities that we have here in Ontario for investment, certainly also in my riding of Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh and the city of Cornwall.

So we have done a lot in the past three years, and we certainly have the courage to do more in the future.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): Before I begin, I want to welcome the students from Dr. John M. Denison Secondary School in Newmarket. This is a particular pleasure for me, having been on staff at Dr. Denison some years ago.

I rise today in support of the resolution put forward by the member from Waterloo—Wellington. I think it's important for all of us to appreciate the fact that the economy is not something that doesn't change; it is in a state of change permanently. I think that it's important, then, looking at this resolution and the manner in which it's presented to us, that an investigation should begin.

If you look at various areas in the literature on the economy, you can see how important it is to keep abreast of the kinds of challenges we face. I'm going to take a moment to read what I think is a very important explanation in a paper presented by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives called From Bronze to Gold. In that, they discuss why there has to be a creative economy. It says:

"The extent of our prosperity as a country depends on how much value Canadians can create through their labour and what returns they can earn on their savings.

"This is why concepts such as productivity and competitiveness matter to all Canadians. Other countries are passing us by in raising their standards of living because they have found ways to attract more investment, generate higher returns and create more jobs that pay higher wages. Higher productivity produces more money for individuals and families to improve their quality of life directly. It also generates more tax revenue for governments to provide better public services and infrastructure."

I think that is really why the member from Waterloo—Wellington undertook this resolution, because it is important, both on the basis of individual families and society as a whole.

When you look at some of the features that I believe any task force or any committee should be looking at, one of those surely is to take advantage of or recognize the need for skilled people. We hear constantly of areas of shortage in particular areas of industry and commerce, and looking at immigration and integration of people into this country is certainly one of the key steps. Our leader, John Tory, introduced a paper on immigration that's designed to benefit both the individual who comes to this country and that individual's opportunity to integrate within our community and be a part of a productive and strong community.

One of the other areas that's very important to developing a strong economy is the question of the creation of ideas, because everything starts with an idea

and the ability to take that idea and transform it into a product or service. That's why, as a member of the former government, we invested in providing research funding, specifically to be able to take the very best from our universities and colleges and move those ideas into products and services.

Another area that, again, is vital to a strong economy is the ability to attract investment. In today's global world, obviously investment can come from anywhere, including at home. So the importance of having a tax structure that remains competitive, that becomes a method of attraction, is absolutely paramount in a world where money can be transferred in a matter of minutes and investments can be set up in a matter of days.

Another area that is equally important is the regulatory one. Obviously, everybody has to abide by regulations that deal with safety, that deal with quality and a host of other things, whether it's the environment or personal health. But those regulations must be timely, they must be predictable, they must not overlap and they must be seamless. Only in that way can you provide surety within the regulatory environment.

In the brief time I have left, the question of energy costs is obviously a very important issue. We look at this province today, where closing coal-fired furnaces has moved from being a promise to what the Minister of Energy now describes as a "noble goal." That doesn't create the kind of stability or the kind of opportunity for competition that we need in Ontario.

Finally, the question of transportation: It has to be something that provides opportunity for goods and services, for people to be able to travel.

I noted with interest that the Minister of Finance introduced in a speech a couple of months ago something he referred to as the dark clouds gathering on the horizon. I suggest to the government members that supporting this resolution would in fact go a long way to dissipating those dark clouds.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Waterloo-Wellington.

Mr. Arnott: I want to express my appreciation to all of the members who have spoken to this important resolution today—the members for Hamilton East, Mississauga West, Erie-Lincoln, Parkdale-High Park, London-Fanshawe, Simcoe North, Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh and, of course, York North—all of whom have offered the House thoughtful comments with respect to the issue of the manufacturing challenges that we're facing in the province of Ontario.

I received word just now from our party's economic development critic, the member for Halton, who informed our caucus that the Statistics Canada numbers for the month of September have just been released this morning. Manufacturing output has fallen in the month of September by 1.4%, which is a substantial drop, and of 21 major industry groups, 16 cut back production. Of course, the manufacturing sector is very important in the province of Ontario, and so these national numbers would reflect, in a huge negative sense, on the province of Ontario.

When I brought forward this resolution in May 2005, it was my belief that I could bring the issue forward, put it before the Legislature, and that in the summer of 2005, the all-party standing committee on finance could begin public hearings and public discussion with the affected interest groups, including organized labour; I had hoped that the Ontario Federation of Labour and the auto workers—everyone who has an interest in manufacturing jobs—would have had a chance to participate in this discussion. I had envisioned that over the course of the summer we could develop an action plan, and that it could be presented in the House in the fall and the government could start implementing it. That was a year ago, and it was a year and a half ago that I introduced the resolution. Much time has been lost.

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Of course, we know that the finance committee will very shortly undertake important work with respect to its pre-budget consultations. That process is going to start a little earlier this year than normally is the case. We are going to be starting in December and then resuming after Christmas. My suggestion now is, if this resolution passes the House, I would hope that it will be accepted by the government and that the standing committee on finance and economic affairs will be directed to undertake this study immediately after it concludes its pre-budget consultations, so as to provide an action plan that can begin to be implemented this spring.

Obviously, much time has been lost. I wish that this could have started a year and a half ago, but given that it hasn't, I would hope that the government will take this seriously and take seriously what's been discussed today. I would say again, this resolution has the support of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters of Canada, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, the C.D. Howe Institute, the Ontario Real Estate Association, Canada's Chemical Producers, the Employers' Advocacy Council and the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. And I know that the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity is very interested in what we do here today. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I ask all members—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

I would ask members to join me in welcoming to the Legislature, in the members' east gallery, Ruth Grier, former member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore in the 33rd to 35th Parliaments. Welcome.

COMMUNITY RIGHT TO KNOW ACT (DISCLOSURE OF TOXINS AND POLLUTANTS), 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE DROIT DU PUBLIC D'ÊTRE INFORMÉ (DIVULGATION DES TOXINES ET DES POLLUANTS)

Mr. Tabuns moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 164, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, the Environmental Protection Act and the

Occupational Health and Safety Act / Projet de loi 164, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur, la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement et la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Tabuns, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): I rise to ask the members assembled in this chamber to take action—action to protect public health, our environment and our emergency personnel. I ask them to vote for this bill, Bill 164, Ontario's Community Right to Know Act, and to move it forward to committee stage. It encompasses a community's right to access information on pollutants released into the environment, a consumer's right to know about hazardous substances they may be exposed to when they buy a good or a service, and the right of firefighters to know about the chemicals they may encounter in responding to a fire.

Community-right-to-know legislation is identified as a best practice in cancer prevention and environmental protection. It's been a fixture in jurisdictions like California for the past 20 years. In contrast, Ontario and the other provinces of Canada lag far behind. Bill 164 is supported by the likes of the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control, the Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition and the Toronto Environmental Alliance.

Community-right-to-know recognizes the inherent right of individuals to know the hazardous substances to which they may be exposed. It's for these reasons that community-right-to-know is endorsed as a primary cancer prevention measure and a tool for environmental protection by environmental and health advocates.

Research linking negative health impacts with exposure to pollutants and toxins in our environment continues to grow. And we are exposed. Environmental Defence Canada found 38 carcinogens in the small sample of persons it tested as part of carrying out its study on pollution in Canadians entitled *Toxic Nation*. The incidence of cancer in Canada has risen by over 54% over the past 18 years. Almost one in two Canadian males and more than one in three Canadian females will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in their lifetimes.

To give you a sense of the public interest in the issue, today is November 30. The *Globe and Mail* has been running major articles about cancer virtually every day since November 20. They'll continue to run articles until December 6. Their December 6 piece will focus on the environmental links to cancer.

This series has considerable traction, in part because this disease now touches most Canadians' lives, either directly or indirectly. The response to the series so far mirrors how large audiences watched and responded to Wendy Mesley's series on CBC this past year, *Chasing the Cancer Answer*, in which she confronted the gaps in Canada's cancer-fighting strategy, one of which is reducing Canadians' exposure to known or suspected cancer-causing agents in the first place.

An aging population can help explain the rising rate but not completely. Genetics can help explain that rising rate but not completely. The Canadian Cancer Society has found that, after adjustments for age, the incidence of non-Hodgkins lymphoma, thyroid and testicular cancers, all of which have links to environmental contaminants, has risen among Canadians in the age bracket 20 to 44.

Research and the action plans derived from this research, like the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control, are increasingly calling for urgent acceleration of cancer prevention policies, including measures that lessen or prevent our exposure to toxins.

Boston University School of Public Health and the University of Massachusetts Lowell released in September 2005 a research paper entitled *Environmental and Occupational Causes of Cancers*. It concluded, "Cancer evolves from a complicated combination of multiple exposures. No one exposure single-handedly produces cancer, and many causes of cancer are still unknown.... The sum of the evidence regarding environmental and occupational contributions to cancer justifies urgent acceleration of policy efforts to prevent carcinogenic exposures."

Today, we can take action to help prevent at least some cancers by reducing our exposure to toxic chemicals. We know with certainty that some substances cause cancer and others are suspected of triggering it, and we have taken some steps to deal with them. In this bill, we take a long overdue step forward.

The first part of the bill adds a provision to the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, that requires consumers to be informed about a commercial good containing known or suspected carcinogens. This aspect of the bill, known as the "labelling provision," has garnered the most attention so far. A host of organizations, including the Canadian Cancer Society, have long called for such labelling of consumer products. California, Vermont and the European Union already require such information labelling.

Unfortunately, existing legislation here in Canada does not provide us with that protection. It doesn't provide us with the information that we expect, as analysis by the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control has demonstrated. The Hazardous Products Act does not address protecting consumers against chronic, low-level exposure from toxic substances in household products. Canadian Consumer Chemicals and Containers Regulations, the Food and Drugs Act and the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act don't require full disclosure of all potentially harmful ingredients, such as carcinogens.

Health Canada finally, after prolonged delay, introduced new labelling requirements for cosmetics, but it doesn't require labels to indicate if the product contains a known or probable carcinogen. Labelling is a shared jurisdiction, something that both the provinces and the federal government can do, as confirmed by lawyers at Health Canada and by environmental law experts. In fact, Ontario already exercises its power to impose labelling. It has requirements for a range of items. If you check your upholstery or your bedding, the label detailing the quality

of fill is an Ontario-imposed requirement. We have the power; we already use it.

By acting in this field, Ontario will fill a vacuum that currently exists and start protecting consumers. In doing so, we will follow a path that's already been blazed by California with its proposition 65, adopted in 1986, that provided consumers with information about the hazards they faced with some products, but also brought about change in the way that products were made and the contents of those products to eliminate cancer-causing agents in ceramics, nail polish removers, white out and bottled water.

1110

People ask, "How will we determine which carcinogens or suspected carcinogens to list?" The schedule would be drawn from the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a body of the World Health Organization. How will that information be disclosed? In terms of the shape and form of the disclosure, we can borrow from the best practices in Vermont and California. In California, there are proposition 65 labels, and there are notices that can be issued. In Vermont, information labels can be placed on store shelves where items that contain known or suspected carcinogens are placed.

I've been asked about the economic impact of this legislation. California has carried out five-year and 10-year reviews on the impact and found no noticeable economic impact from this legislation.

The second part of the bill establishes a comprehensive pollution inventory containing a variety of information relating to the type and level of pollutants released into the environment and their environmental and health impacts. In the absence of a formal community-right-to-know policy, Ontario doesn't provide a consolidated, comprehensive inventory that aggregates information about emissions to water, land or air.

The third part of the bill amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act to require employers to provide to the local fire department all material safety data sheets which list hazardous materials that are on site. This will be of tremendous utility to firefighters' knowing what they're encountering when they go to a scene, and it complements the pioneering work done by my colleague from Hamilton East, who has worked on these issues of occupational health and safety for firefighters.

I've outlined the substance of the bill and the reasons for adopting it. I call on all my colleagues in the House to take the next step in cancer prevention, to take the next step in empowering communities, to take the next step in protecting our emergency responders. I call on them to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I'm pleased to speak on Bill 164, introduced by the member for Toronto-Danforth.

Bill 164 proposes to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The proposed amendments to the OHSA, section 38, would require the employer to provide to the local fire department copies of all the material safety data

sheets, which the OHSA requires the employer to have for hazardous materials used in the workplace.

I would like to remind the members in this honourable House about the history of section 38 of the OHSA, the Occupational Health and Safety Act. When section 38 of the OHSA was first drafted in the late 1980s, the Ministry of Labour consulted the fire services sector through the section 21 committee. At that time, fire departments advised the ministry that they did not want—and I repeat, they did not want—to automatically receive the material safety data sheets from employers. They felt at that time that they did not have the ability to handle the volume of information they would have received from employers, nor would this information have been useful in many instances. In the 15 and more years since section 38 has been enforced, fire services have not advised the Ministry of Labour that changes are needed to enhance their access to workplace material safety data sheets.

The OHSA already provides a mechanism through medical officers of health for the public to have access to information about hazardous materials used in workplaces within their community. Therefore, any member of the public can go to the local medical officer and ask to see a copy of all MSDSs for a workplace within the local public health unit. That is available already.

I would also like to remind the member for Toronto-Danforth, as well as all honourable members in the House, what the McGuinty Liberal government is doing for workers. First, the health and safety of Ontario workers is our number one priority, and we certainly have shown that in many instances. Exposure to hazardous substances is a major cause of occupational illness and adds significant cost to businesses through lost time and higher workplace insurance claims. Under Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act, occupational exposure limits are established to protect workers.

In the year 2004, our government implemented a system to update annually occupational exposure limits for hazardous chemical substances in the workplace. This approach means that limits are updated annually based on the recommendations of the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists. The ACGIH annually publishes recommendations developed using the most up-to-date information in scientific and medical literature. Of course, before this system was put in place, OELs were not significantly updated for nearly 15 years, so we have done that.

In 2006, this year, we have consulted to update occupational exposure limits. For instance, in 2006 we invited stakeholders to review the proposal for changes to the limits for 27 substances. This includes new limits for two substances and revised OELs or listings for 25 substances.

The McGuinty government wanted to know what our stakeholders thought about the proposed limits. We also wanted to hear about other substances that stakeholders thought should have an occupational exposure limit. The consultation period ended in September of this year. The ministry is now reviewing the comments received from the stakeholders, and you will hear from the minister.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): It's my privilege and pleasure to speak to Bill 164. I support this brave piece of legislation by my colleague Mr. Tabuns. It's certainly a piece of legislation that we need, and we need it soon.

I just wanted to start off by quoting something from the Cancer Prevention Coalition. They talk about the risk for leukemia increasing "by four to seven times for children, ages 10 and under, whose parents use home or garden pesticides." They go on to speak about "the risk of childhood brain cancer ... associated with the use of pesticide 'bombs' in the home, pesticides to control termites, flea collars on pets, insecticides in the garden or orchard, and herbicides to control weeds in the yard, including exposure to two common pesticides available in garden shops—carbaryl and diazinon.

"In 1990, more than 4,000 toddlers under age four were admitted to hospital emergency rooms as a result of household cleaner-related injuries" and infections related to that. Again, these are just a few figures that one could throw out. "Residues of more than 400 toxic chemicals—some found in household products and foods—have been identified in human blood and fat tissue" as hazardous and also as carcinogens—over 400. That's a significant number.

I want to draw the Speaker's attention to my former life, and that was as a United Church minister. It was then my sad duty over many years to preside over more than 200 funerals. Many of those funerals were the deaths of those under my care who had died from cancer. I remember the honour and privilege of being able to sit with their families, to be bedside with them as they suffered, and then as they breathed their last. We engaged in those conversations in a great many deep theological issues, questions like, "What will happen to me after death?"; questions about, "Why would a loving God do this to me?" The conversation was always free-flowing. It never lagged.

But I do remember one young woman who was about 28 years old at the time of her death. She had cancer. She said to me, "You know, I've never smoked. I've never engaged in any hazardous activities. I've never worked in a plant where there were hazardous materials. I want to know not what will happen after my death but how my death happened." I was unable to answer that question, and so were the doctors, nurses and all the specialists who had attended this one individual. She passed away at 28.

I've also sat at the bedsides of children who have died, again of cancer. They've never smoked, never touched hazardous materials that they know of, and yet there is no answer forthcoming.

1120

Certainly this bill, Bill 164, is part of the answer to that young woman's question and part of the answer to the questions of the children's parents because, until we know what is in our homes, what is in our makeup and what is in all of those materials that surround us daily, we don't know what is killing us, and it's literally killing us.

It was interesting doing some research on this, and all of the websites that came up. There is a huge amount of support for an endeavour, a piece of legislation, like this.

I was looking at a website that is run, kept and maintained by the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics. Many of us in this House, both male and female, I'm sure, use cosmetics. They point out 12 different issues:

"(1) Toxic chemicals are widespread in beauty products—and in our bodies.

"(2) The government should be protecting us, but it's not.

"(3) You can't believe industry safety claims.

"(4) The \$35-billion cosmetics industry routinely opposes laws that would protect consumers and the environment.

"(5) We have to protect ourselves until we convince the government to protect us." The endeavour here today is to try to convince this government to protect us.

"(6) Two of the highest-concern cosmetics categories are marketed especially to" African–Canadian and "African–American women." This bill also touches on some feminist issues that are close to my heart.

"(7) Most product ingredients have never been assessed for links to long-term health problems. However, even ingredients that are known to cause harm can be put into personal care products. Eight of the most problematic are"—and I will stop here, because I know my colleague wants time on the clock to speak to this bill as well. But things like these are in products that we use right now: mercury, lead acetate, formaldehyde, toluene, petroleum distillates and coal tar. Do we know this? Do we know that when we use soap, it might have one of these ingredients? Do we know if the skin cream that we use might have some of these ingredients? Do we know about the products we use on our babies? Do they have some of these ingredients in them? There is no way of knowing right now, under the current situation in Ontario, and certainly in Bill 164 we begin to address that problem.

I can't imagine why one would oppose this bill, why one would not want to see this bill pass speedily into law. Of course we need to know. How can we spend billions, and we spend billions on cancer research, when this little piece of the puzzle is left out?

Again I go back to my experience as a United Church minister and all of those bedsides that I stood beside, all of those families I sat with, and particularly that 28-year-old woman who asked that question, "How did I get this cancer?"

I think everyone in this House would want to answer her and would want the tools to be able to answer her. I certainly encourage everyone in this House to support this brave piece of legislation, Bill 164.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It is a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to speak to the private member's bill of my colleague the member for Toronto–Danforth. I know a little bit about cancer. I lost my father at age 63 and my mother at age 66, so I know the impact this terrible scourge has on one's family.

I asked some folks in the Ministry of the Environment yesterday to look at this issue and give their observations on this particular bill. I happen to think it's appropriate to have a pan-Canadian approach to deal with this particular issue and to provide levels of standards for each and every Canadian from coast to coast to coast. In fact, in working with Environment Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, that's the course they've recently embarked upon.

I have some information that's been provided to me by Nancy Croitoru, who is the president and chief executive officer of Food and Consumer Products of Canada. I'll just read into the record some of the points that she's making.

Currently, as we speak, "Environment Canada and Health Canada have together embarked on a groundbreaking systematic investigation of over 23,000 substances currently used in Canada, as mandated by the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA). CEPA is a key piece of legislation that regulates all substances from a human health and environment protection perspective. It governs the safe use of substances in Canada. The federal government's risk assessment process is taking into account information from a variety of sources including published scientific journals and databases, international reports" and extensive international research "computer modelling estimates, and commercial data from" various industry and health stakeholders.

Over the next 36 months, this group—Environment Canada and Health Canada—will be looking at producing a set of new standards that will be pan-Canadian, that will:

"Limit the use of certain substances to specific dosage levels

"Limit the use of certain substances to specific applications

"Eliminate substances from commercial use entirely

"Allow commercial use of the substance with no" severe "restrictions.

"Environment Canada and Health Canada have made a commitment to complete risk assessments on 500 high-priority substances within the next 36 months. The Canadian food and consumer products industry takes product safety very seriously. If Environment Canada and Health Canada decide, following comprehensive risk assessments of specific substances, that current levels of use and application need to change to further protect human health and environment, industry" and other provinces "will comply fully."

Indeed, I've had the opportunity to review my colleague's bill, Bill 164. By comparison, at this time, his bill is limited to about 411 substances and I believe lacks the comprehensive scope and scientific rigour of the federal government's current risk assessment in this area. This bill would also apply to Ontario consumers only. Indeed, just yesterday I had the opportunity to speak with executives from Unilever, which is a large multinational corporation that employs union employees here in Ontario and right across Canada. One of their chief con-

cerns, of course, is always, when we change regulations—and they're supportive of changing regulations, because they're in the consumer products business. But to have one standard in Ontario that we move forward on, and then to have the federal government in about 36 months' time add another series of regulations—they think it's easier for them from a business perspective to go to the higher federal standards which will be in place when their work is completed by Health Canada and Environment Canada over the next 36 months.

We also have, of course, the Environmental Protection Act in the province of Ontario. Our approach, undertaken by this current government, was to toughen the standards so carcinogens just won't be allowed to enter into the environment. Notification versus prevention and reduction—it's as simple as that. Getting toxins that cause cancer, make children sick, out of the plant environment, out of the air in their schoolyards and out of the products in their homes is what regulation 419, that we've implemented, is all about. What's more, it's the first time that the province has adopted a comprehensive risk assessment approach that puts human health, especially children's health, at the forefront of the analysis that is undertaken in order to set toxic chemical limits in the field.

Our approach is about getting results from communities, about involving communities and setting very high standards. Indeed, to give you one example, playground equipment, we have playground equipment in every community throughout Ontario. There was a real issue, particularly for that playground equipment that incorporated pressure-treated lumber. At that particular time there was an issue with regard to chemicals that were incorporated in that pressure-treated lumber used in building new playground facilities, not only in one's backyard, but indeed in schools. So there were dramatic changes made then by the Canadian Standards Association and Health Canada to make sure that those substances, that product, was eliminated for use in the building of schoolyards. I happen to believe that the pan-Canadian approach that's been embarked upon is the right one: high standards right across the country, which we know the province of Ontario will be involved in, in consultation with the federal government, to make sure that we have the highest water and air standards in the country and that we protect our citizens.

1130

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I appreciate the opportunity to join the debate on the private member's Bill 164, the Community Right To Know Act, introduced by my NDP colleague and critic for the Ministry of the Environment, the member for Toronto–Danforth. I've certainly had the privilege and the opportunity to get to know the member since he was elected, as we toured across the province for the hearings on the Clean Water Act, Bill 43. He has a great depth of knowledge on environmental issues. As well, he's certainly personally dedicated to those causes, as we've seen here since he was elected to the Legislature, but also

from his past associations before he entered the field of politics. I certainly appreciate the intent of the bill that he has introduced today. He did a lot of research into preparing us to speak today, and he's developed the idea through. So I thank him for all the work that he has done.

He has indicated that California is the state which has had this right to know in for some 20 years, saying that we can follow other models. In politics, I don't think we have to reinvent the wheel; as with anything, we can look to see what other countries, other jurisdictions, have done. But he's looking for the best practice that we can get in cancer prevention and environmental protection. He has indicated that Ontario lags behind in this jurisdiction, and there's no question that we can always do better and learn from other cases, as I mentioned before. Ontario has been trying over the past number of years. Yes, we lag behind, but we have made some forward steps, and I believe that this private member's bill today is another part of that step forward that we need to engage in debate about. So I thank him for that.

I know that the previous government brought in some initiatives that included the development of the anti-smog action plan in 1996, which committed to reducing smog-causing emissions by 45% by 2010. They introduced mandatory monitoring and reporting of 358 harmful air pollutants for all industry sectors, formed the drinking water division of the Ministry of the Environment, and created the position of chief drinking water inspector and the requirement for a yearly report on the status of drinking water quality in Ontario. They implemented the first air quality index in Canada, which gave reports on air quality seven times a day, seven days a week, which I'm sure you hear on the radio all the time. But that's good; it's part of the education system out there. They implemented airborne contaminant discharge monitoring and the Ontario Water Resources Act. They initiated the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Environmental Protection Act, and introduced the Nutrient Management Act and the Environmental Assessment Act.

So we have done a great deal of work in the province to protect our citizens; I've mentioned some of the laws and regulations that exist today. But we can do more, and we should never stop investigating all the positive methods of protecting Ontarians. That is our job as legislators. Bill 164, which was brought forward today, does directly address some of these issues that are of the utmost importance.

I know the Canadian Cancer Society was here last week. For sure, cancer rates are increasing every year. In Canada, the statistics show that they've risen by 54.4% over 18 years. An aging population explains part of that, but it doesn't explain it completely. I know statistics about non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, thyroid and testicular cancer have been mentioned, all of which have links to environmental contaminants. They've risen among Canadians aged 20 to 44, and those statistics are from the Canadian Cancer Society in April 2002. According to the Children's Health Environmental Coalition in 2002, cancer now ranks as the most common cause of death by disease for children.

I've spent over 20 years as a nurse. I certainly see the disease first-hand and how we have to use more preventive methods for early detection, but also address why the rates are increasing. It's a bigger picture out there. This is what this private member's bill brought forward by the member for Toronto—Danforth is trying to make us aware of.

The member for Peterborough mentioned earlier that all of us have instances of cancer in our family, our loved ones being taken way too early in age. And we look back and we say, "How could we have prevented that? What was he exposed to? How do we prevent further exposure to this possible cancer-causing agent?"

There's a lot of interest in pesticides, especially in rural Ontario. Education and more research needs to be done on what they're exposed to in dealing with the agriculture industry. And the agriculture industry itself has made some progress in research. You see municipalities—and there's an incident in Quebec where the municipality took the lead on banning pesticides used on lawns. So there are some forward-thinking people who are using initiatives to make it known, to educate us on how we can further protect ourselves from cancer-causing agents.

Certainly the major part is prevention, reduction and educational awareness for consumers, employees and just the population in general. So we should be doing everything in our power to ensure that pollutants and toxins do not have the exposure to cause the adverse effects that we hear about and see, some of us first-hand, every day.

There's concern, certainly, in the legislation. I think here we all want everyone to work together, and that is business, industries and everyone to have input into how we can all work to protect our citizens. We have to work with the retailers. It's important that they have the sustainable and correct balance that we can strike. Labelling how, when and what—how is it going to go on? If we don't have the co-operation, we're not going to move this forward as quickly as we want to.

The bill also affects a number of other acts currently in place, including the Consumer Protection Act, in that no consumer be sold or supplied goods unless the person is informed of the chemicals and the risks. It also amends the Environmental Protection Act and aims to create a pollutant inventory which would be available to the public. Thirdly, it will amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to require employers to provide safety data sheets to the local fire departments.

We've had the fire departments in, speaking about the increased cancer risks with their job, with situations they were going into, the statistics they have—certainly they all have colleagues they work with who have contracted cancer—and the struggle they have to prove that their cancer is connected to the occupation they're in, and they want to protect their families. So it affects all sectors, and we've heard about the different groups that have come in and told us about the increased cancer rates associated with, in this case, the fire departments and their increased exposure to cancer-causing agents.

We need to work with everyone: businesses, emergency medical services, and it goes on. So it's good to debate, to try to strike a balance of education and awareness, and put with that legislation and regulations that we can embrace co-operatively and make people more aware. Simply posting environmental reports on the ministry website will certainly educate some and make more consumers and businesses aware, but how many people go on there? How many people look? There are questions about how many people read the warnings on labels, as they presently stand. Usually people who are sensitive to products, whether they're aware because of their own self-interest or because they have allergies, read more than the majority of us who go into stores, buy products and don't really think twice about what's in them. That's back to the components of the bill, that we need to make more people aware of what carcinogenic agents are out there.

1140

The member from Toronto-Danforth did a great job last week. I thought he got a great amount of media around this right-to-know bill that he's bringing in, and he certainly created more awareness for myself as I read the articles.

With regard to the regulation, including the labelling provision for both known chemicals and those that could possibly or probably cause cancer, there are a great deal of carcinogenic groups listed in the details of the bill—group 1, group 2, and it goes on and on. So that is why I think we need to consult with stakeholders and the federal government. Certainly the province and the municipalities can take the lead, but we need to have a consensus as to the probable, the possible, the amounts. We need to take the lead not only as a province but as a country to strike that balance, to see the scientific data and to figure out who is going to be the responsible body for identifying the materials which are known or suspected carcinogens in consumer goods.

Who's ensuring that these reviews, as was mentioned—the member from Toronto-Danforth said that there are reviews in California every five or 10 years on the impact, which is great. I think that should be in the legislation, in the regulations, if we can get that far. Everything needs to be reassessed. Research is advancing. We're finding out more things are harmful than we ever knew before, and that's just part of the evolving scientific world we live in.

Both the provincial and the federal governments need to have a hand in this for it to be most effective. As is often the case with environmental health initiatives, cities, states and provinces all have certain jurisdictions over aspects that relate to these issues. Again, we always say that we want all levels of government to work together. Sometimes we don't get there, but it's critical that we work together, especially with issues about health concerns, and that it's set out what needs to be labelled, what the carcinogen is, who it's decided by and who does the review.

The Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control has stated that minimizing and eliminating, where possible, the

public's exposure to carcinogens should form a foundation of public health policy. There's no question; I don't think anybody disagrees with that. And the Canadian Environmental Law Association has stated that they look forward to support for Bill 164 as it moves through the legislative process. That is what we'd like to see for this bill, that it be moved forward through the legislative process.

It's also important to note that we've heard from Food and Consumer Products of Canada, which has stated their concerns with the bill as it stands. Food and Consumer Products of Canada is saying that Bill 164 has limited scope and reach, will cause undue consumer confusion and alarm, and that implementation would be complex and costly. They're concerned that it's going to pre-empt a comprehensive federal substance initiative currently under way at Health Canada and Environment Canada.

We've got some pros and cons and some people worried, so let's all sit down together and review it. The member from Toronto-Danforth has taken the lead in the province of Ontario by saying that it's a right to know, that we should get some more labelling done and at least give the people a chance to be made aware and educated. I think that's a noble thing to do. I certainly promote more discussion and look forward to this bill going to committee so that we can discuss it. Let's strike the balance; let's all work together co-operatively. I hope that all members of the Legislature will look at this bill seriously and move it through the legislative process in the positive manner in which this bill is being presented to us today. Thank you very much.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's certainly my pleasure to rise in support of my colleague Mr. Tabuns, from the riding of Toronto-Danforth, in his attempt to have us get on to a more positive, proactive phase when dealing with toxins and carcinogens in our environment.

Bill 164 is a bill that has been brought forward by my colleague. It's probably a bill that should have been here, debated and passed many moons ago. You'll know from his remarks as well as other remarks in this debate that many jurisdictions are far ahead of Ontario and far ahead of Canada in regard to this very, very serious issue.

Before I speak specifically to the issue around how these toxins and agents in our environment and in everything we eat, drink and breathe affect children particularly—and I have an interest in that as the critic for children and youth services—I wanted to first acknowledge and compliment my friend for including the issue of material safety data sheets for firefighters.

Certainly people in this Legislature are well aware of the fact that firefighters do unfortunately become susceptible to many diseases and cancers as a result of exposure to carcinogens and toxins in their jobs as firefighters. That's what my bill, Bill 111, was all about: to acknowledge the fact that these hazards are the everyday reality of workers who happen to be firefighters as they undertake their profession in helping and saving people and property from fires. Just to go quickly over what those

cancers are, what those diseases are: primary site brain cancer; primary site bladder cancer; primary site kidney cancer; primary non-Hodgkin's lymphoma; primary leukemia, including multiple myeloma; primary site ureter cancer; primary site colorectal cancer; primary site lung cancer; primary site testicular cancer; degenerative neurological disease; primary site esophageal cancer; primary site stomach cancer; as well, there's an issue around the effect on the heart of the kinds of work that firefighters do.

That's only one piece of this bill before us, the piece that says when there are these kinds of agents, materials or toxins in a business, in a community, that information about those products or those toxins be provided to the firefighters in that community so that they understand what it is they're getting into as they rush in to save people and property, if a fire should occur in that location. So I laud my colleague for adding that or including that in the bill that he's brought forward.

I wanted to focus a little bit more in my remarks on the issue of toxins in the environment and what they do to our children. Members of this Legislature should be aware, in fact, that Environmental Defence has been doing some work on this issue for some time here in Ontario, and has come up with a recent report, actually, that was tabled, I believe, or that was made public in June 2006, just a couple of months ago.

I wanted to read a couple of quotes from this particular report, or at least the summary of the report. The Environmental Defence report is quite substantial. Members, I encourage you to actually have a look through it. It's extremely interesting on the one hand and extremely frightening on the other hand. "Canada's Toxic Kids: Pollutants Contaminate Children's Bodies: First-ever study reveals children have higher levels of some chemicals than their parents." The report is called *Polluted Children, Toxic Nation: A Report on Pollution in Canadian Families*. "The groundbreaking report, *Polluted Children, Toxic Nation ...* reveals that toxic chemicals, such as stain repellents, flame retardants, mercury, lead, DDT and PCBs, are polluting Canadian children and their parents. In several cases, children in the study were more contaminated than their parents by chemicals that are still in use, including stain repellents (known as per-fluorinated chemicals or PFCs), brominated flame retardants (PBDEs), heavy metals, organophosphate insecticide metabolites, and PAHs (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons)." How do you like that? I should have taken a science degree. "Many of the chemicals discovered in the children's bodies are associated with cancer, developmental problems, respiratory illnesses, damage to the nervous system and hormone disruption."

It's a first-in-Canada report that tested a number of children and their parents. I just wanted to share with you this one quote:

"Our children are being poisoned every day by toxic chemicals that surround them at home, school and play," said Dr. Rick Smith, executive director, Environmental Defence. "The fact that children in our study have higher

levels than their parents of a number of chemicals is an indictment of federal inaction and shows the failure of federal environmental law."

1150

Of course, our member from Toronto-Danforth would argue that the provincial government has a role to play. It can be an actor in the prevention of these kinds of exposures by giving people the opportunity to be aware of what they're exposing themselves and their children to through labelling and through the process of indicating for people where local industry, for example, is polluting or what they're spewing into the air in their manufacturing process or whatever else they're doing as a business in that community.

Here's what one of the parents said: "When I saw how many different chemicals are in my body, I was astounded. But when I saw the toxic chemicals in my son's body, I was angry. Our children deserve better protection."

This is a bill that is certainly well at its time and, in fact, is probably something we should have done long, long ago in the province of Ontario. I think that the member from Toronto-Danforth should be absolutely supported in moving the yardsticks on this. I look forward to every member of this Legislature who has children, who has grandchildren or who has nieces and nephews to take a look at this, acknowledge and understand that we can't simply go around with our head under the cover, pretending that these things don't exist and, worse, pretending that they're not affecting our children, because they absolutely are.

I recently had an opportunity to spend some time at a conference in the United States. I received some information at a workshop there about this very issue and have been reviewing some of the data and information that they provided to me at that time: *Healthy Environment, Healthy Kids: A Guide to Children's Environmental Health*. Just reading what's happening in some of the American jurisdictions puts us to shame in terms of what we are not doing here in Ontario and in Canada. Just on the issue of connecting environment to children's health and environmental effects on children's health, I could list a number of different jurisdictions: the California Legislature, the Hawaii Senate, a Michigan House bill, a New York assembly bill, another New York assembly bill, a Virginia state joint resolution, a Washington state bill. What these bills do is that generally they're the impetus or the structural creation of children's environmental health and protection advisory councils or sections of government that actually are committed and resourced to deal with children's environmental health impacts.

I was looking through that information and was very interested to find the things that we know for sure: Children are closer to the ground. They're very tactile. They're touching and putting things in their mouths all the time, especially in their young years, those very years when their organs and brains are forming. This is when

the exposure is great. This is when children are breathing three times as much as adults. They're drinking three to four times as much liquid as adults are. They're eating two to three times more, based on their body weight, than adults do, so their exposure is significantly higher. It should be no surprise, then, that we find high levels of chemicals and toxins in children. We have to stop that. Give consumers the opportunity to decide whether or not they want to expose their children.

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West—Mississauga): I'll be speaking today on Bill 164, the Community Right to Know Act (Disclosure of Toxins and Pollutants). This bill proposes amendments to three different acts and three different ministries. I would like to focus on the consumer protection provisions with the time I have today.

Under the amendments proposed, suppliers would be prohibited from providing a consumer with goods or services that expose the consumer to toxic chemicals. The supplier must warn the consumer of the potential exposure, and that warning would usually be in the form of a label. I understand that the member from Toronto—Danforth is proposing this provincial piece of legislation due to frustration and slow progress federally. Believe me, we share that frustration on a number of fronts on this side. But the amendments presented in Bill 164 are not appropriate and will present a patchwork of standards. Legislation of this nature is more appropriate to the federal government's programs, given their current role in both product labelling in general and for health or hazard concerns.

The Consumer Protection Act, 2002, does not currently apply any requirements to product labelling, nor does the Ministry of Government Services administer any such requirements. Health-related labelling or disclosure has not traditionally been addressed under consumer law. In addition, even when not specialized, product labelling is dealt with primarily at the federal level. There are several federal laws that address product labels, such as the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act, the Canada Agricultural Products Act and the Food and Drugs Act.

There is a very limited provincial involvement in the field of labelling except in, for example, upholstery and stuffed articles. The federal Hazardous Products Act does not require disclosure on some chemical products and establishes the use of some commonly recognized hazard symbols; for example, symbols such as the skull and crossbones for "toxic."

I would also like to discuss some of the operational components of administering Bill 164. It's been said that the costs would be negligible because the government already has labelling legislation and bureaucracy to enforce the act. This statement is not correct in reference to the Ministry of Government Services and with respect to either the legislation currently administered or existing programs.

If the bill proceeds, it would be required to seek legal advice with respect to the authority of the province to

regulate in this field and to enact these specific requirements, given the existing federal legislation.

I like the general thrust of the bill but I do have certain reservations towards it.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Tabuns, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Tabuns: I'd like to thank the members from Thornhill, Parkdale—High Park, Peterborough, Haliburton—Victoria—Brock, Hamilton East and Brampton West—Mississauga for taking part in this debate.

I have to say that I don't have a lot of confidence in the federal government, moving forward, but no one should be surprised. What's interesting to me is that the government, which has consistently expressed lack of confidence, is saying, "Leave it to the government at the federal level to act." I don't find that a consistent position.

I appreciate the comments of the member for Brampton West that in fact we could get into debate in committee. We could go through this bill, improve it, find out where there are weaknesses, deal with those and build on its strengths.

I have to say, in response to the comments of the member from Peterborough, that it's interesting, when I introduced the tobacco legislation in the city of Toronto in the 1990s, that I heard essentially the same arguments at that time. I find it odd to have these recycled arguments continue to come back when people try to take action on cancer.

I want to thank a number of groups for the heavy lifting, the work that they did, to actually do the research and analysis and provide me with a basis for bringing forward this legislation: the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the Toronto Environmental Alliance, the Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition, Environmental Defence, and the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control. Those organizations are devoted to protecting us from cancer. I think their advice and their analyses were sound. I was pleased to present a bill in this Legislature that carries forward the arguments that they've made.

I'd like to thank Ruth Grier and Lina Cino for being here—those who have fought very hard to prevent cancer. I also want to thank Fiona Nelson, who is not able to be here but whose words were very simple: "Get on with it."

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will first deal with ballot item number 63.

Mr. Arnott has moved private member's notice of motion number 6. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

COMMUNITY RIGHT TO KNOW ACT
(DISCLOSURE OF TOXINS
AND POLLUTANTS), 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE DROIT DU PUBLIC
D'ÊTRE INFORMÉ (DIVULGATION DES
TOXINES ET DES POLLUANTS)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 64, standing in the name of Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Tabuns has moved second reading of Bill 164.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Tabuns—

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): I would like it moved forward to the committee on regulations and private bills.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Tabuns would like the bill referred to the standing committee on regulations and private bills. Agreed? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair, and the House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1201 to 1330.

MINISTER'S COMMENTS

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wish to clarify remarks I made yesterday in response to a question from the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I made comments around the events of the native occupation in September 1995. As we all know, there is currently a public inquiry underway into the circumstances surrounding those events. I join all members in this House in respecting the role of the inquiry and awaiting its findings. I regret if my comments were interpreted otherwise.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WATER AND SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I rise on behalf of John Tory and the PC caucus to once again make note of the ongoing promise-breaking and avoidance of responsibility by the McGuinty Liberals. Yesterday, a sewage report card was released by Sierra Legal which indicated that billions and billions of litres of raw sewage are being poured into our Great Lakes. Those are disgraceful numbers, but what's even worse is that the Minister of the Environment has had in her hands for over 15 months her own government-commissioned Watertight report. That report outlines the aging infrastructure deficits for water and waste water that are in desperate need of repair. The Minister of the Environ-

ment hasn't once had the courage to step forward, and refuses to address the aging water and waste water infrastructure in Ontario. Yesterday, in the House, the minister indicated the location of her riding by saying, "I look at that lake every single day." The minister thinks it's okay to simply look at the lake while at the same time allowing billions of litres of raw sewage to be poured into it.

The member from Perth–Middlesex had made a point of commenting on other members who have missed votes. So let's address that. I think it's particularly important to note that this member from Perth–Middlesex did not bother to show up for the vote on the resolution on November 16 regarding the Green Lane landfill site purchased by the city of Toronto. This is—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member knows full well that you don't refer to the absence of other members. So please refrain from it.

Ms. Scott: I was responding to a similar point that the member from Perth–Middlesex had made earlier in the week.

But let's go back to the member from Perth–Middlesex, with the now-famous broken promise for waste diversion: "We have an amazing plan." I think it's time for the Liberals to stop being paper environmentalists and saying anything to get elected.

HOLLY MICUDA

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I rise today to recognize a very important person. Her name is Holly Micuda. She's an 11-year-old Oakville elementary school student. I'm rising to recognize her for her outstanding contributions in support of Canadian amateur athletes. I recently had the privilege of visiting Holly's school with Adam van Koeverden, two-time Olympic gold medalist from the 2004 Olympic games in Athens, who, I might also add, is from my riding of Oakville. It's my great pleasure today to welcome Holly to the Legislature along with her father, Tony. Please join me in welcoming them; they're in the members' gallery.

This remarkable young girl has taken action and set the ambitious goal of selling 500,000 Canadian Athletes Now bracelets in support of our athletes. Holly has already sold 18,000 bracelets, with all proceeds going to Canadian Athletes Now. She is a great role model for us all and especially our youth. In support of Holly, I've purchased a bracelet for each member of this Legislature; many of you will have them. I would invite members to proudly wear them and promote this great initiative in their own ridings. Donations can be made to, and additional information is available on, the Canadian Athletes Now website at www.Canadianathletesnow.ca.

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): I rise in the House today for the 1.2 million Ontarians who earn under \$10 an hour and the approximately 200,000 who

earn minimum wage, two thirds of them women. Many of those women have children, children who often need to use food banks. There are 13,500 children who use food banks in the GTA alone. We know that a third of those children have parents who work.

In 1989, all parties agreed in the House of Commons to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000, and yet one in six of our children are currently impoverished. We know one of the best weapons against poverty is a living wage. Ten dollars an hour is the poverty line. Anything less than that is unacceptable in a jurisdiction as wealthy as Ontario.

We in the New Democratic Party are not calling for a raise in the minimum wage so much as asking for back wages owed to our poorest citizens. In 1972, the minimum wage was \$2 an hour. Using the Bank of Canada inflation calculator, that would be just under \$10 an hour today. I ask that my bill for a living wage be brought back for third reading and passed as soon as possible.

In this season when we are called to be generous and gift our children, let us call upon this government to be generous and gift its children.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): The energy sector in this province has a problem. From one day to the next, they can't figure out where this Liberal government stands on energy in the province of Ontario.

Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals promised they would shut down all coal-fired generation by 2007, come hell or high water, and they promised that they would replace it with one of the key components of that replacement power, being wind. So what did they do? They lured investors into Ontario with promises of lots of wind development going to be going on in Ontario, which would obviously be advantageous to them from a financial point of view.

What do we find out now? A few weeks ago, they told those people, "If you're planning to build wind, the opportunity to build wind is over. If you're planning to connect between Tobermory and Lake Huron down to Longwood and Lake Erie, we're reserving those lines because they're full for other forms of generation." Now we find out that they've put a moratorium on wind development on water. So many wind projects are now either delayed or outright dead. How can they be taken seriously when their policy changes like the wind?

With regard to coal-fired plants, with the incoherent policy they have we don't know when they'll stop operating, but we do know that as long as they do, they will burn much dirtier than they would have under the Progressive Conservative government. Shame.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): I rise today to speak about the McGuinty government's

efforts to ensure that Ontario can succeed in the new economy.

In the three years we've been in office, we've leveraged over \$7 billion in new auto investment, which is creating 7,000 new jobs; introduced a \$500-million advanced manufacturing investment strategy to help manufacturers develop cutting-edge technologies; and made a record \$6.2-billion investment in post-secondary education. We have also invested in research and researchers at our universities, and we're helping Ontarians bring new technologies to market. The Premier has led a trade mission to China and will lead another one to India and Pakistan in the new year, because we understand that developing business opportunities with the fastest-growing economies in the world can only be good for business.

While we're doing all this, Peter Kormos and the NDP showed us last week that they're still stuck in the past. While we work to build on relationships that are worth over \$1.2 billion in two-way trade each year, they speak disparagingly of "junkets." It just goes to show that Mr. Kormos and his friends didn't learn any lessons from their time in office. They made all the wrong decisions then, and they can't support the right choices now. While we on this side of the House are working hard to make sure that Ontario can thrive in the new economy, the NDP is stuck in their tired and failed policies of the past.

1340

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 107

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): If there was any doubt left that the government made the wrong decision to shut down public hearings on Bill 107 and stifle hundreds of groups from presenting their views, it vanished yesterday as the Liberal members on the committee were so disorganized that they feel asleep at the switch and mistakenly deleted a section of their own bill.

This mismanagement and lack of integrity that the government has shown with respect to Bill 107 has been nothing short of extraordinary. The Attorney General claimed that he was prepared to debate this bill "for however long it takes," and then he not only cut off public hearings, he introduced 60 amendments and had them discussed in just one day of clause-by-clause consideration, about half of which were passed without debate due to the guillotine time-allocation motion.

The Premier stood up in this House on Monday and claimed that his government had listened to groups like AODA and the African Canadian Legal Clinic. Those two groups have repeatedly expressed their dismay at the Attorney General's refusal to consult. In fact, we have a letter from the executive director of the ACLC, Margaret Parsons, stating, "The African Canadian Legal Clinic has not been consulted at any time by the Attorney General."

In the words of Keith Norton, the former chair of the Human Rights Commission, this is quasi-constitutional legislation, yet this government is so arrogant that it has

no problem cutting off debate and muzzling people. The irony that the government deleted one section of the bill indicates their mismanagement from the start. They couldn't organize a one-car funeral.

WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): Violence against women is one of the most serious human rights violations on this planet, and the White Ribbon Campaign is the largest effort in the world by men working to end men's violence against women. The campaign was started by men in Canada in 1991, on the second anniversary of the December 6 Montreal massacre, and has now spread to over 50 countries around the world. Each year, between November 25, the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and December 6 we wear the white ribbon as a symbol of our commitment to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women.

We have all heard about the horror stories of the violence perpetrated by men against women and we are all sickened by them. I have spoken before in this House about the need for all of us to stop violence against women. I have spoken before in this House about the need to educate men, young men and boys that violence against women in any form is absolutely wrong.

The organizers of the white ribbon campaign say this: "While most men may never condone or use violence against women, we believe that all men have a responsibility in ending it." I agree with them and I know all men in this place do too.

I've also had the opportunity and pleasure of joining the mayor's task force in Brantford in our drive to eliminate violence against women. I encourage us all to sign a campaign commitment that I will be circulating in the House in the near future.

EDUCATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): In the month of October, I took the opportunity to visit two of the many schools in the riding of Huron-Bruce. This is an annual tradition that I started upon taking office. I must say that every year that the McGuinty government has been in control of the education system, the improvements are so visible, not only to the people coming in but to the students, teachers and parents. Everyone is so grateful.

This year, I visited with students in Mount Carmel and Lucknow and had the opportunity to see at first hand how the education system is serving those we cater to: the students. Thanks to a \$545-million investment in smaller class sizes, once again they are shrinking, as promised. Since taking office, our government has also funded a total of 3,600 new teachers in the province to help further reduce class sizes. We are on track to implementing a cap of 20 students per classroom in the primary grades.

In addition to adhering to our promise to reduce class sizes, we have also begun to improve overall education standards. In 2004-05, 62% of elementary students were meeting the standards in reading, writing and math. This is up from only 54% of elementary students.

I could go on and on about all the ways the McGuinty government is improving education from what it was, the tattered system with the previous government.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I rise today to highlight some of our achievements in the McGuinty government in energy production.

The negative effects of pollution on our environment are undeniable. As a Liberal government, we not only understand that but we are working very, very hard to do a lot about it.

Under this government, Ontario has gone from worst to first in wind power generation. We are now the national leader, having gone from 15 megawatts of generation to a whopping 414 megawatts, thanks to Premier McGuinty's leadership in this area.

Unfortunately, the New Democrats and the Tories failed us when they were in power. The New Democrats failed us by slashing conservation programs and cancelling the Manitoba Hydro deal. The Tories failed us on renewables, on hydro costs and on reliability.

There are many figures being bandied about. We're hearing all sorts of numbers and all the rest, but many of them are not accurate, and we need to be accurate when we're talking about this. Let's look at the facts: The facts are that the monthly average price for electricity in October 2003, when this government first took office, was 5.9 cents per kilowatt hour. The average price in October 2006—just last month—was 4.02 cents, a decline of 32%.

The facts are that the McGuinty government has worked hard to ensure Ontario's energy needs are met at an affordable price with a focus on renewables and conservation. That means sustainability. We are proud to be managing electricity generation responsibly and effectively so that we will have it long into the future.

VISITORS

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): On a point of order, Speaker: I would like to welcome to this honourable House from my riding of Thornhill the grade 5 class from E.J. Sands Public School with their teacher, Mark Molder, and a number of parents and other teachers. Welcome.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I have two points of order I'd like to do. First of all, I'd like to welcome to the Legislature former MPP for Sudbury Mr. Jim Gordon, who's here with his wife, Donna, today in the west members' gallery. They are visiting their grandson, Connor Boyce, who's here as a page at the Legislature.

For my second point of order, I'd like to welcome Peter Marshall and the environmental class from George Brown College, who are in the east visitors' gallery. They're here visiting Queen's Park this afternoon.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on justice policy and move its adoption.

The Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 107, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code /
Projet de loi 107, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Shall the report be received and adopted?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1348 to 1358.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Dhillon has moved adoption of a report from the standing committee on justice policy.

All those in favour, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Qadri, Shafiq
Brotten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Racco, Mario G.
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Ramal, Khalil
Cansfield, Donna H.	Marsales, Judy	Ramsay, David
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Rinaldi, Lou
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McNeely, Phil	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Meilleur, Madeleine	Sergio, Mario
Delaney, Bob	Milloy, John	Smith, Monique
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Van Bommel, Maria
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Watson, Jim
Duguid, Brad	Peters, Steve	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peterson, Tim	Zimmer, David

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Sterling, Norman W.
DiNovo, Cheri	Martel, Shelley	Tabuns, Peter
Dunlop, Garfield	Miller, Norm	Tory, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael	Yakubski, John
Klees, Frank	Runciman, Robert W.	

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 42; the nays are 20.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
Pursuant to the order of the House dated Tuesday, November 21, 2006, the bill is ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PROVINCIAL ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR L'INTERVENANT PROVINCIAL EN FAVEUR DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES

Mrs. Chambers moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 165, An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth /
Projet de loi 165, Loi visant à créer la charge d'intervenant provincial en faveur des enfants et des jeunes et à y pourvoir.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Does the minister have a statement?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'd like to make my statement in ministerial statements, Speaker.

OWEN EISSES ACT (WRONG-WAY SIGNS AND LIGHTS ON CONTROLLED- ACCESS HIGHWAYS), 2006

LOI OWEN EISSES DE 2006 SUR LES PANNEAUX ET LES FEUX QUI INDIQUENT UNE MAUVAISE DIRECTION SUR LES ROUTES À ACCÈS LIMITÉ

Mr. Wilson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 166, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to wrong-way signs and lights on controlled-access highways /
Projet de loi 166, Loi modifiant le Code de la route à l'égard des panneaux et des feux indiquant une mauvaise direction sur les routes à accès limité.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Does the member wish to make a statement?

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act to require the Minister of Transportation to install signs and flashing red lights on every ramp leading to or from 400 series highways in the province if the ramp is designated for one-way traffic. The signs and lights will indicate to drivers whether they are driving the wrong way on the ramp. In addition, the Minister of Transportation is required to install large red-and-white wrong-way signs on these highways, warning drivers that they are going the wrong way on the highway. Similar signage is currently in place in Nova Scotia and British Columbia. There have been 259 incidences

reported by the OPP in the last six months alone in the GTA and in the central region of drivers going the wrong way on these highways.

The bill is named after Owen Eisses, now two years old. When he was seven months old, he and his mother survived being hit by a wrong-way driver on Highway 400 just near Barrie. Unfortunately, the man who hit them died in that accident.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
AMENDMENT ACT (SALARY IN LIEU
OF RETIREMENT CREDIT), 2006
LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
(TRAITEMENT TENANT LIEU DE DROIT
À RETRAITE)

Mr. Runciman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 167, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act with respect to salaries in lieu of retirement credits /
Projet de loi 167, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative en ce qui concerne le traitement tenant lieu de droit à retraite.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Does the member wish to make a statement?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I regret to inform members that this doesn't cover what they hope it covers. This is actually a reintroduction of legislation that has been altered on the advice of the Speaker. What it does is amend the Legislative Assembly Act to remove age discrimination against older members of the assembly. There are members on both sides of the aisle who are impacted by the current wording of the act, and hopefully we'll have the support of all three parties to address this situation.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

CHILD ADVOCATE

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): Today, our government is taking a very significant step forward to provide better protection for vulnerable children and youth. I am pleased to announce the introduction of legislation to make the province's child and youth advocate an independent officer of the Legislature. In moving forward with this change, we are fulfilling a promise this government made on behalf of our most vulnerable children and youth to better protect their interests.

While in opposition, we announced we would pass a law that would have an independent child and youth advocate report to the Legislative Assembly. We said the appointment would take place through an all-party legislative committee. And we said we could make the advocate as independent as the Auditor General and the Ombudsman.

This legislation would meet that commitment. When it comes to the rights of our children, there is no room for political interference. If passed, this legislation would ensure that no government, current or future, could attempt to suppress the voice of the child advocate, because if the advocate's voice is not heard, we run the risk of letting down our most vulnerable kids.

The child advocate represents children and youth who are seeking or receiving services under the Child and Family Services Act. Those services could be in the youth justice system, in the children's mental health or complex special needs systems, in the child protection and well-being system, or in provincial and demonstration schools for the deaf and blind. The advocate's office also reviews cases that involve complaints about the treatment or care of a child or youth in a program funded by the Ontario government.

Every year, the advocate's office receives more than 3,000 calls. The majority of calls have been about standards of practice in residential care, violence between peers, children living at home with special needs and aboriginal child protection. Simply put, the advocate speaks for children and youth who are unable to bring their issues forward on their own behalf.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize Judy Finlay, who is in the east gallery. For more than 15 years, Judy Finlay has served with the utmost compassion and integrity as Ontario's chief advocate for children and youth. I have had the privilege of working closely with Ms. Finlay as Minister of Children and Youth Services. She has helped me to acquire a more profound and more personalized understanding of the substantial challenges that some of Ontario's children and youth face in their day-to-day lives. I would also like to recognize Les Horne, Ontario's first provincial child advocate and the current executive director for Defence for Children International-Canada. We also have youth and Voices for Children here.

1410

We anticipate that the independent child advocate would issue annual reports and special reports, as necessary, championing the systemic and perhaps individual concerns of children and youth who might otherwise not be heard.

There are members of this Legislature of all political persuasions who have at one point or another expressed support for our government's commitment to the establishment of an independent child advocate. So I am looking forward to all-party support of this legislation. If the legislation we're introducing today is passed, Ontario will have an independent watchdog looking out for the province's children and youth.

By making the advocate truly independent, we will be giving children and youth the strong voice that they deserve. Establishing an independent advocate will serve not only to further protect the rights of our young people, but will also give them a right to be heard.

This is an exceptional opportunity for this Legislature to demonstrate its support for Ontario's most vulnerable children and youth.

WORLD AIDS DAY JOURNÉE MONDIALE DU SIDA

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I rise in the House today to draw attention to World AIDS Day tomorrow, December 1, which also marks the end of National AIDS Awareness Week. At this time, I'd like to ask for unanimous consent for all members to wear the red ribbon in the assembly today to commemorate this important date of awareness.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The minister asks for unanimous consent for the wearing of the red ribbon. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Watson: World AIDS Day gives us reason to pause to reflect on the HIV/AIDS pandemic. World AIDS Day reminds us of suffering left in the wake of this pandemic that respects no borders and continues to exact an enormous toll on the people of the world. We know that 39.5 million people worldwide are infected by HIV/AIDS, more than the entire population of Canada.

In Ontario, more than 24,000 people are living with HIV/AIDS. Of that number, some 28% are women, a number that has doubled since 1999. As well, there's been a 106% increase in HIV diagnosis in Ontarians from African and Caribbean countries, a 42% increase in HIV for gay and bisexual men, and a 29% increase in HIV for IV drug users.

World AIDS Day is a time to recognize the courage of, and affirm our support for, people living with HIV/AIDS, their families, their caregivers and their communities.

Aujourd'hui, nous manifestons notre respect et notre admiration aux professionnels de la santé qui font face à cette crise avec passion et compassion. La communauté des intervenants ontarienne en matière de VIH/SIDA a accompli un travail extraordinaire dans la lutte contre cette pandémie.

This was deeply demonstrated this past summer when we hosted the 16th International AIDS Conference, the largest of its kind in Canada. It was an event of enormous pride for Toronto, for Ontario and for Canada.

It was a landmark conference. It merged medical science, human compassion and social tolerance on an unprecedented scale. More than 15,000 delegates—including scientists, health care providers, researchers, activists, UN workers, community, business and political leaders, global media reporters and people living with HIV/AIDS—gathered right here in Toronto. We owe thanks to the conference organizers, including the International AIDS Society, and the Toronto local host.

I'm proud that our government provided \$3 million to support this international event as well as the establishment of a scholarship program.

Knowledge and discovery across the disciplines flowered in scores of presentations by pioneering minds. It became clear that strong, compelling scientific information from strong, knowledgeable voices can indeed motivate nations, corporations, and international organizations to do more and to do it better.

I commend the researchers who worked so hard to find new treatments for people living with HIV/AIDS. They're the people who transform raw information into coherent research and then transform research into action.

I commend the activists and the educators who share knowledge. It's knowledge that leads to prevention. It's knowledge that's shared and used to improve care, treatment and prevention services. And it's knowledge that defeats ignorance, our most pressing enemy.

In remembering those who live with HIV/AIDS, we must not forget that thousands of HIV-positive Ontarians also experience HIV/AIDS-based stigma and discrimination. Stigma is a major obstacle to effective HIV/AIDS prevention and care. Fear of discrimination prevents people from seeking HIV testing and treatment or from acknowledging their HIV status publicly. It drives them underground and it furthers the spread of this deadly pandemic.

Now is the time to reflect on our own strategies to prevent HIV/AIDS and care for people here in Ontario. This year, our government will be spending roughly \$55 million for HIV/AIDS-related programs, and that does not include physician billings to OHIP or HIV/AIDS drugs.

In my community of Ottawa, for example, our government provides \$1.5 million to fund eight community-based organizations that provide HIV/AIDS prevention services as well as treatment and housing services for people living with AIDS. They include the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, Bruce House, the Oasis program at the Sandy Hill Community Centre, Ottawa Health Research Institute, Ottawa Public Health, Pink Triangle Services, Somerset West Community Health Centre and the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa. We are very proud, in Ottawa, of these groups and the compassionate work that they do day in and day out to help support those individuals and their families living with HIV/AIDS.

As legislators, we can be rightly proud of what the government has achieved. But we must remain diligent. We must support education that makes society more fully understand the nature, destructive capacity and preventability of HIV/AIDS. After all, we will be judged by our actions in response to this human tragedy. I want the record to show that in Ontario we did, forcefully, compassionately, decisively. That is our plan. We'll continue to partner with more than 80 HIV/AIDS organizations in this province, including the Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS.

We'll continue to strive for new prevention strategies addressing high-risk groups across Ontario, and we'll

reach out to undiagnosed individuals, at least 8,000 people in Ontario who don't know that they're infected, with prevention efforts in high-risk communities. We're expanding the number of anonymous HIV-testing sites across the province.

We'll continue to support those living with HIV/AIDS and we'll unceasingly promote education to people at high risk. We'll continue to fund the AIDS hotline that provides telephone information, counselling and referral to local community agencies. We'll fight stigma and discrimination. We'll innovate in our quest for treatments. We'll ensure treatments are accessible to those who need them.

Nous poursuivrons notre quête de connaissance et continuerons à appuyer la recherche. Nous continuerons à financer le Réseau ontarien de traitement du VIH/SIDA, un organisme indépendant regroupant de multiples intervenants et créé dans le but de soutenir la recherche spécialisée dans le domaine du VIH/SIDA.

We'll share our findings and our knowledge with the world until the world no longer needs a World Aids Day. Merci beaucoup.

The Deputy Speaker: Statements by ministries? Responses?

CHILD ADVOCATE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): I'm proud today to stand to respond to the Minister of Children and Youth Services on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party.

We in the Progressive Conservative Party are very proud of our progressive past in being the first to introduce legislation and a child advocate in this province, under the premiership of Bill Davis. Les Thorne is with us today; he was our first child advocate. I'd like to welcome him—I guess he's just stepped away.

1420

We also have with us today Judy Finlay, who I understand has taken some 3,000 calls this year on behalf of children, and Agnes Samler and Matthew Geigen-Miller, who have been tireless advocates and who have met with me, and I know with other members of this Legislature. You deserve an awful lot of credit, too, as great advocates for children in this province.

In 2003, this Liberal government promised an independent children's advocate. Twenty months ago, one year and a half ago, the former Minister of Children and Youth made a promise, and I quote, "The McGuinty government will introduce legislation this spring."

Now today, three years after they made the first promise and 20 months after the second, we see before us legislation that, I won't kid you, may never see royal assent based on the time frame. But interestingly enough, the announcement comes the same day when the CBC is reporting a leaked copy of the Auditor General's report detailing improper spending at children's aid societies across Ontario.

Never has the need been greater to advocate on behalf of Ontario's most vulnerable children. Today, I was saddened and disappointed to learn that several executives with children's aid societies across this province were given vehicles, including two SUVs worth over \$50,000 apiece. Sources with residential treatment centres indicate to me that \$50,000 would go a long way in the treatment of one troubled youth in a year. We also learned in this CBC report that one third of cases reviewed revealed that initial visits to Ontario's at-risk children were delayed by, on average, three weeks. Someone must protect these children, and it is clear not enough is being done today.

On behalf of John Tory and the Progressive Conservative caucus, I want to assure Ontarians that we will take this legislation very seriously. We will study it, we will consult on it, and we will make sure this government gets it right. We will be there every step of the way to ensure funding to children and youth has the appropriate oversights so never again will we have to learn that children's aid societies have traded kids for cars.

We will be there every step of the way to ensure that we are measuring the effectiveness of programs for our children and youth, so that we are not just blindly throwing money at a problem, hoping it will go away. No, we will be there every step of the way to ensure that our kids come first so that never again will we learn that money meant for our most vulnerable children in this province is being spent on junkets for staff to the Caribbean and China.

I assure you the PC Party will be active participants in this legislation on behalf of Ontario's children.

WORLD AIDS DAY

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I'd like to make a brief comment with regard to World AIDS Day and the Minister of Health Promotion.

First of all, I'd like to acknowledge the work that was done and has been done by Stephen Lewis, a former leader of the New Democratic Party in this Legislature, on behalf of many, many, many victims of AIDS, particularly in Africa. I acknowledge his frustration with the problem, but I urge him to keep working in the way he has in the past on behalf of these defenceless children.

Secondly, I would say to the Minister of Health Promotion, in the most constructive way possible, that he and his ministry should put a great deal more emphasis on fighting this particular matter. On his website there is no mention of HIV or AIDS. There's no information about preventing HIV or AIDS.

On our MPP guide to the Ministry of Health Promotion, there is only mention of this particular noting of World AIDS Day.

I believe this problem is much, much more important than some of the other issues perhaps his ministry has been paying attention to. So I urge him, in the most constructive way: Let's get on with fighting this as we have

fought perhaps smoking in Ontario. I believe that this is probably a more urgent and more important problem.

CHILD ADVOCATE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): In response to the minister responsible for children and youth services, I have to say that New Democrats not only support the idea of an independent child advocate, but in fact have been pushing this government to keep its promise year after year in this very Legislature. Whether it was the initial promise just before the election that was made by Dalton McGuinty, whether it was the promise that came from the then minister, Marie Bountrogianni, back in March 2005, regardless, at every single chance we got, we were getting up and trying to convince this government that now is the time. Unfortunately, they didn't see, three years ago, that now is the time, but today they've seen that perhaps it is finally time.

It's interesting that this comes at a time when, yet again, the public is concerned about what's happening with our children's aid societies in Ontario. I have to say that while the government has diddled and wasted time on this particular issue, children have suffered in this province needlessly. And today we hear from a leaked Auditor General's report that in fact there is perhaps financial wrongdoing at a couple of children's aid societies in Ontario. This is unnecessary. Had the government brought this legislation forward earlier, things like this may have been headed off. In fact, had the government done what we expect them to do, which is to bring companion legislation into place that creates an independent oversight of the children's aid societies by the Ombudsman, like the bill that I introduced into this Legislature, we would see true oversight of children's aid societies, which is what we need in this province.

I have to tell you I was shocked, when I took some time to look at this compendium that came with the bill on my blotter today, to see that the provincial advocate would not have formal investigatory powers and would not be able to summon and enforce the attendance of witnesses, compel testimony under oath or compel the production of documents or evidence.

This government is hamstringing the very advocate they are saying they need and want in this province to look after the interests of children. Shame on you.

I look forward to the legislative agenda as this bill goes through the process and New Democrats can look through the details of what else might be in this bill that might be a surprise to people who think that the government is fulfilling a promise. I can tell you, they are not fulfilling it to the degree that we think they need to. So we too will be there. We'll be there through committee hearings, we'll be there through clause-by-clause, and we will be making sure that the government of Ontario finally does the right thing by the children of Ontario.

Today is a sad day, because the government not only took this long to get here, but it is doing so in a way that

does not give the child advocate the tools that he or she is going to need to do the job for the children of Ontario. That's what New Democrats have to say.

WORLD AIDS DAY

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Tomorrow, December 1, is World AIDS Day. We in Ontario need to acknowledge the grim reality that there are 24,250 people who are now living in Ontario with HIV, 32,037 people in Ontario have been infected with HIV, and 8,267 Ontarians have died. We are all touched by AIDS; no one is immune. We need to respond effectively and aggressively every day.

There are three points that I want to make about what the government can do.

The quality of care for AIDS patients varies greatly. In northern Ontario, for example, people have to travel a long distance to access medical care, to access specialized care, and to receive emotional support. The northern health travel grant is not flexible enough to allow these patients to have these needs met, and it needs to be. Changes have to come with respect to the travel grant.

With respect to the ODSP process and income, many people who live with HIV/AIDS depend entirely on ODSP for their income support. That's why on September 11, 2005, the Ontario AIDS Network passed a resolution calling on the government to do the following: "To promote a raise in the monthly income of recipients to a level that reflects the real cost of living, including all the basic necessities of life and shelter costs." This government is sadly failing in this regard. In May 2006, the Report of the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults said, "Since 1995, ODSP benefits have eroded from inflation by roughly 22% ... the benefits are still less than federal benefits for seniors who have no other resources." In fact, even with the increase in ODSP in the March budget, once inflation is taken into account, ODSP recipients are worse off now under the McGuinty Liberals than they were under the Harris-Eves government, and that is a shame.

Finally, with respect to Bill 107 hearings, it's interesting that the Ontario AIDS Network requested standing at the Bill 107 hearings before July 10, 2006. I don't know if they were in favour or if they were opposed; neither does anybody else, because these hearings were shut down, were choked off, and groups like this one, like the Ontario AIDS Network, never even had a chance to have their say. Shame on this government for choking off that committee.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to draw your attention, and that of the table, to page 6554 of Hansard from yesterday. In response to a question from Mr. Tabuns, I believe I'm recorded as saying, "In the Ontario

small town and rural program: over a period of time, over \$3 million." In fact, that should read "\$300 million." I'd like to correct my record, Speaker.

1430

VISITOR

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: As a former Olympian, I'd like to acknowledge and thank Holly Micuda, who is in the east gallery, for helping our Canadian athletes. Holly sold 18,000 wristbands to raise money for our Canadian athletes. Thank you, Holly.

ORAL QUESTIONS

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Today, the CBC is reporting there's been a leak of the section of the Auditor General's upcoming annual report dealing with the children's aid societies. The stories claim that more than \$1 billion of taxpayers' money is spent each year by the children's aid societies without any oversight at all by the government. The story goes on to claim, in the extract from the report, that instead of going to children, this money is being spent on luxury cars and expensive trips—and there are a lot of details on that. This is hard-earned taxpayers' money that is supposed to be going to help children, but instead it seems that it's being spent on cars and trips.

What does the minister have to say to the children, to the foster parents, to the people who work in that field who are short of resources and to the taxpayers about this gross mismanagement taking place on her watch?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): The first thing I'd like to say is that I'm very proud to be the member of a government that saw fit to expand the powers of the Auditor General to enable the Auditor General to look into the books and the operations of children's aid societies so that we can ensure that children in need of protection are, in fact, better off because we are involved their lives.

Mr. Tory: I would suggest that the minister and the government don't have very much to be proud of when we hear that thousands and thousands of taxpayers' dollars are going to provide luxury cars, trips and things like that instead of going to the children who need it. That's nothing to be proud of.

My question is this: We have reports of several CAS executives getting \$50,000 SUVs. That is thousands of dollars more than deputy ministers get for their car allowances. Another one had a car and got a \$600-a-month car allowance.

If the oversight the minister claims is there, that you're taking so much credit for, will she tell us, were you per-

sonally briefed on a quarterly basis, as I believe is the case, on the reports the children's aid societies submit to your ministry, and when did you become aware of these extravagant expenditures of taxpayers' monies going to cars and trips instead of kids? When did you know about it?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: First of all, I will not comment on a report that has not yet been released by an officer of this Legislature. You should know, as Leader of the Opposition—in fact, as a trained lawyer—that I could be accused, and you would be the first person to accuse me, of being in contempt of the Legislature if I pre-empted the Auditor General in releasing a report. So I would suggest to you that I'd be happy to take your questions next week.

Mr. Tory: What I know, as a member of the Legislature, is that you have had the allegations contained in this section of his report for months, because you had an opportunity to respond to it, and we'll see that when his report comes out on Tuesday.

So my question was, when did you first know about these allegations of spending money on trips to the Caribbean, expensive luxury cars and car allowances for people who already had a car, instead of that money going to the children? When did you know about that? And what I want to know further—beyond your knowing about trips to the Caribbean and Buenos Aires, and gym memberships—is what did you do about it the minute you found out, not waiting around behind some excuse of a report that hasn't come out yet? You know about these allegations; what did you do about them?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Let me tell you some of what I know. The auditor's reports in 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2002—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: —raised concerns about children's aid societies. What happened? His government—their government—would not allow the auditor access to those books. Our government has given the auditor the opportunity to access that information so that we can—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. New question.

Mr. Tory: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Children's aid societies today are responsible for \$1 billion of the taxpayers' money. Your government keeps track of the number of eggs laid by chickens on farms each year and reports that to the public. You keep track of the number of bears killed by municipal agents and the number of phone calls that come to the bear hotline. All I asked you today is, when did you find out about the allegations that took place not on the watch of some previous government but on your watch, the watch of the McGuinty Liberal government, when money was being spent on luxury cars, money was being spent on trips to the Caribbean and on gym memberships instead of being spent on vulnerable kids in this province? So let me try again: When did you first learn of these allegations and, even more importantly, what did you do about it? What specific actions did you take to stop this gross mismanagement of the taxpayers' money?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I really have to tell you, I take exception to vulnerable children and youth being compared to eggs and bears. But then again, that's the history—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I warn both sides that it's difficult to hear the questions and the replies. I would like your co-operation in that respect. Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: So once again, let me remind you—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Erie-Lincoln.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Let me remind you of your record. It's interesting that our government is introducing legislation for the independence of the child advocate. Do you know what their government did, Speaker? They actually muzzled the advocate. There is a lot, perhaps, that they could have done during their two terms in government that we are doing now and will continue to do.

Mr. Tory: I'll just keep trying here, because what we're talking about is money that was spent on your watch during the last year, the term of the McGuinty government, or the last couple of years—allegations that were brought to your attention months ago. We want to know, first of all, when were they brought to your attention, and, even more importantly, what did you do about it? What we have here is money that is being spent on trips to the Caribbean and gym memberships instead of on winter coats or other help for children. That's what we have. And all you can get up and do is talk about anything except your responsibility for that money as the minister in charge.

Stand up in your place and tell us. All we want to know is when you found out and what you did about it. If the answer is, "Nothing," fine; tell us it's nothing. But don't keep trying to evade the responsibility.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Let's talk a little bit about evading responsibility. Today is actually an exciting day for other reasons, such as the proclamation of Bill 210. And I seem to remember the struggle I had from the leader of the official opposition in passing a bill to help strengthen and protect children in the care of children's aid societies because he was more interested in following around and stalking one of my colleagues. What are we talking about?

Interjections.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: You know exactly what I'm talking about.

I stand by our record. It is our government that is doing what needs to be done to protect the children and youth in this province.

Mr. Tory: The sad part is that, at the same time as all this is going on—the trips to the Caribbean, the gym memberships, the cars—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a minute. Minister of Economic Development and Trade, come to order.

Mr. Tory: The sad part is, as the trips to the Caribbean and the cars and the gym memberships are taking

place at the taxpayers' expense, the children's aid societies are failing the children they're supposed to protect. The at-risk kids, in the very same report you have, are being left unvisited for an average of three weeks longer than they should have been. Some kids never received a visit, and yet all you can do is sit here and not answer at all for what is your responsibility. It's outrageous.

One more time, I'll try. What specifically did you do, upon having these misexpenditures of public money brought to your attention, to make sure that the vulnerable kids were getting the money—not the trips, not the cars and not the gym memberships? What have you done?

1440

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The leader of the official opposition should relax, because if he thinks I am going to do anything that will demonstrate contempt of this Legislature in responding to a report that has not yet been released by an independent officer of this Legislature, to whom our government has given expanded powers so that we can better protect the interests of children and youth in this province—the auditor tried to do that when they were the government of the day. They made it absolutely impossible for the auditor to protect Ontario's children and youth. It's our government that's doing that, and we will continue to take steps like Bill 210, like the independence of the child advocate and like the expansion of the auditor's powers to ensure that we provide better protection for children and youth in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: New question.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The Auditor General has found shocking evidence of improper spending at four of the largest children's aid societies. The auditor says that under the McGuinty government, children at risk went without basic services while CAS executives spent money on high-end restaurants, jetted to the Caribbean, South America and Asia, and spent money on luxury vehicles costing more than \$50,000 each.

Minister, you're responsible for this ministry. I think you owe people across Ontario a straightforward and direct answer. When did you first learn about this situation?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The leader of the third party is also, I gather, a trained lawyer. So if he thinks that I am going to give him the opportunity to accuse me of contempt of this Legislature or if he thinks I am going to speak to a report that an independent officer of this Legislature has yet to release, he is sadly mistaken. But I look forward to responding to that report when the auditor tables the report.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, this is about your responsibility to vulnerable kids, some of whom were dying while these improprieties were happening. You know how the auditor's system works. They come back to your ministry officials and they give you the information. They give you this report before it's ever released to the

public so that you have a chance to respond to it. And that's the question here. Your officials would not have been kept in the dark; they would have received this information from the Auditor General's office. You would have had a chance to respond.

The question is this: When did you first learn about it and what did you do about it, other than look around for someone else to blame?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I may have served for fewer years in this Legislature than the leader of the third party has. However, I know the rules and I will abide by the rules and I will respect this Legislature. I will not show contempt of this Legislature. I look forward to receiving the report of the Auditor General, and I will also look forward to responding to that report at that time.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, you and the rest of the McGuinty government can choose to conduct a charade, but the report is already out there and the report—we know because some of us have been around here for a while—has been in the hands of your ministry officials. This is very serious: kids being neglected. The auditor says that children literally went weeks, months without being seen when they should have been seen. Some kids were not seen at all.

This strikes of stonewalling. It strikes of a government that wants to avoid responsibility, even though you've been the government for three and a half years.

I ask the question again for all those kids who are vulnerable, many of whom have been neglected: When did the McGuinty government learn about this, and what did you do to stop it?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Here is why the leader of the third party shouldn't really be so proud of being around this place for such a long time: In all of the time that he has been here, he did nothing. He did nothing to shine the light on what kinds of services our vulnerable children and youth are receiving in this province.

Our government, the McGuinty government, is the government that expanded the powers of the Auditor General so that the Auditor General could help us take good care of vulnerable children and youth. You have nothing to feel proud about. You have been around here for too long doing nothing. We're the ones who are acting. You're just going to have to accept that.

The Deputy Speaker: New question. Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, over a year ago I asked and my colleague from Hamilton East asked that the Ombudsman of Ontario be given independent investigative oversight of children's aid societies because we were hearing from front-line CAS workers that there were serious problems. Can you tell people across Ontario why the McGuinty government refused to do anything, why you stonewalled, why you delayed the Ombudsman's request to have independent oversight so he could get at some of these issues that were being raised over a year ago?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The leader of the third party has been known to use the word "dither" in this House. In fact, I didn't know that word before he used it. So I am

really wondering if that word can also be applied to the fact that he's just telling us that for quite some time he has been hearing from front-line children's aid society workers that there were problems. What did you do about that? How responsible is it for you to be so-called "hearing" from front-line workers about problems? What did you do about it?

Let me tell you a little bit about their record. It's the NDP that cut \$3.5 million out of children's aid societies. That's what they did about it. I can't see why I should take any lessons from you.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, just to give you a bit of recent history, we proposed an amendment to Bill 210, which you were boasting about today. We proposed an amendment over a year ago that would have given the Ombudsman the capacity of independent investigation and oversight to get at these kinds of problems. What did you and the rest of the McGuinty government do? You voted against independent oversight. You voted against independent investigation of children's aid societies.

My question again, Minister: Can you tell us, what is the McGuinty government's justification for delay and stonewalling on this issue while vulnerable children suffer?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It's our government, the McGuinty government, that expanded the powers of the Auditor General, thereby allowing the Auditor General—I gather you didn't agree with that. I'm finding it really kind of ironic—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Nickel Belt.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: —that they should be speaking about the revelations that they're speculating about, when in fact we're the ones who sent the Auditor General in. They didn't want us to do that. So let's just be very, very clear about it. It is our government, the McGuinty government, that is taking steps, several steps, to better protect vulnerable children and youth in this province, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, your own answers are confusing. You just said a while ago that the Auditor General, then known as the Provincial Auditor, did reports on CASs in 1997, 2000. So don't claim that suddenly you have done something wonderful while children have been suffering and some have been dying, while the McGuinty government stonewalled and delayed on these important issues.

Minister, my colleague from Hamilton East, Andrea Horwath, also put forth Bill 97, which would have given the child advocate independent authority over a year ago. You refused that as well. You stonewalled on that. The McGuinty government promised independent oversight authority by the child advocate in 2003. You promised it again in 2005. It's now a year and a half after that. I ask again: What is the excuse of the McGuinty government for stonewalling on and delaying these important changes that could have happened while vulnerable children suffered and—

The Deputy Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm really very happy to hear that they're interested in establishing an independent office of the child advocate for this province because that means they're going to support the bill that I have introduced today.

But the leader of the third party also has a very selective memory. The leader makes reference to the audits that I made reference to as having been done in 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2002. What the leader of the third party has chosen to forget, and what in fact he has been discussing and accusing me of, is that the auditor could not actually access the records of the children's aid societies. It is our government—and I don't recall them being concerned about that at the time, so there is some question of the argument here on the floor of this House. Without a doubt, we are the ones who expanded the jurisdiction of the auditor so that—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. New question.

Mr. Tory: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: It seems that all of us in here don't understand the rules and procedures, that you're the only one who does. So I just want to go through the procedures that are followed here, and you tell us which part we don't understand.

The auditor conducts the audits in respect of various agencies and ministries and does his work. He then sends the work to you and your ministry for you to comment on and respond to. That was what was done weeks, if not months, ago.

The question that I asked of you earlier was, when you got notice of the fact that there was scandalous misspending going on with trips, cars, gym memberships and expensive meals, did you do anything at that time? Did you phone anybody? Did you write anybody? Did you call your officials in? Or did you just do nothing?

If you don't stand up and say that you did something when you received that draft of his findings, that you at least lifted your finger to protect the children and the taxpayers' money—I don't know why you wouldn't stand up and say what you did do. What did you—

The Deputy Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister of Children and Youth Services?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The Leader of the Opposition is unnecessarily complicating things. This is really very simple. Today is Thursday, November 30, 2006. The report from the auditor will be released on Tuesday, December 5, 2006. You can wait until then and I'll be very happy to respond at that time.

Mr. Tory: It certainly is great to have you tell us and the people and the children of Ontario what they can wait for and what they can't wait for.

The fact is, you get quarterly reports from the children's aid societies in your department, in your own office—quarterly reports every quarter, year in and year out. You have had a summary of the Auditor General's findings for months in your office and you've had time to respond to it already. It's at the printers now being printed and your response is in hand.

All we're asking you is, what did you do when you found out about it to protect the interests of these families and children? What did you do? Don't tell us and the children of Ontario to wait. Get up in your place and have the courage to say that you either did nothing or you did something. Why can't you just answer the question?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The only true courage that has been shown in this Legislature is the courage that has been shown by our government in expanding the powers of the Auditor General, in not muzzling the advocate, and in not hearing stuff from front-line workers and keeping it to ourselves as opposed to enabling actions to be taken in that regard.

I will once again repeat what I've said before. Our government expanded the powers of the Auditor General to help ensure that Ontario's most vulnerable children and youth are provided with the very best protection possible, and we are looking forward to the formal, official release of the auditor's report. It is, in fact, the auditor's report, and I will look forward to responding to that report.

The Deputy Speaker: New question.

Mr. Hampton: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Everyone around here knows how the auditor's office works. They do not keep information from ministries. When they're conducting an investigation, they come back to a ministry and share the information with officials in the ministry and ask officials in the ministry for their response. Only after that process is a report actually released to the public. The question is this, Minister: Your officials have known about this. Did they brief you: yes or no?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'd very much like both opposition parties to know that I will not tire of saying I will look forward to responding to the report when the report, which belongs to the Auditor General of this province, is released. I don't think it's unreasonable for us to honour this Legislature by not showing contempt of this Legislature but by allowing the Auditor General to release his report. Why not? Let's allow the Auditor General to release his report. I am just very happy that we, our government, gave the Auditor General the powers to go and look at what is happening in children's aid societies so that we can better protect Ontario's children and youth.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, you're contradicting your own earlier answers. You are the one who said earlier that the Provincial Auditor has conducted audits into the activities of children's aid societies in the late 1990s and into the year 2000. My question is this, Minister: One of the Auditor General's allegations is that the law of Ontario protecting children has not been followed. Did you inform the Attorney General? Did you inform the Premier? Did you do any of those things which a responsible minister of the crown would have done, Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm really glad to see that the leader of the third party is trying to show some interest in children who need protection, because it was their government that cut \$3.5 million from the child protection system. But let me remind you, because you keep selectively referring to what I've said: In 1997, 1999, 2000

and 2002, the auditor raised concerns about children's aid societies. The problem was that the auditor was not able to go in and access their files and access their information because that government, that claims to be so interested now, would not allow the auditor to have access. I don't recall hearing the third party complaining about the auditor being prevented from accessing that information. It's our government that was concerned about that.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): My question is for the minister responsible for women's issues, the Honourable Ms. Papatello. Minister, as you well know, new Canadian women are among women who suffer through domestic violence. Often, when they access different services, there can be language barriers that are sometimes difficult to overcome. As a result of this, I know that you and Minister Colle made an announcement. Can you please tell us more about the announcement?

Hon. Sandra Papatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): I was very happy to participate last week with Minister Colle, our minister for citizenship and immigration, in a \$2.1-million language interpreter announcement. The very good news about this is that it is helping people across Ontario: 10 different programs being funded to provide 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week interpreter services. What's really important about these services for women, for women who have suffered domestic abuse, is that when they finally have the nerve to reach out and they don't have a language that is in use there, whether it's English or French, now they have access. Imagine the horror of being in that position and they don't understand what you say. But we are there, as part of our domestic violence action plan, to provide those services for so many new immigrants who aren't speaking English or French to have access 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Supplementary?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): Thank you, Minister. It certainly is great to know that we're investing so much in newcomers and programs that will help those whose first language is not English. They especially need help when they need to navigate through our systems. I know that as a part of the plan we have to end domestic violence and to assist women who are victims of abuse, you announced last week an employment pilot program. Could you tell us more about that, and how it would help abused women in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: We have tremendous support from our MPPs in this House for this particular program because, for women who finally make that tough decision to leave, often the barrier to that decision is financial independence, not just for themselves but for their children

as well. This project aims to help women who have suffered abuse or are at risk to actually get into areas, sometimes non-traditional areas for women, where there is a market for good-paying jobs.

We announced two weeks ago now \$4 million in 10 agencies across the province where we can work with them. In Sarnia-Lambton we have the Women's Interval Home that is benefiting here, to actually take women who are preparing to go into the workforce and have them trained in work that can result in jobs.

We've had some tremendous uptake. Our \$4-million announcement last week will result in hundreds of women who will receive training that will help them get back on their feet financially, and not be afraid to stay away from that abusive relationship.

As you know, often the finances will—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. New question.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, as each day passes we're getting closer to the announced closure of the three regional centres for the developmentally disabled: Huronia, Rideau and Southwestern.

As the minister may know, I've toured Huronia and visited with residents, with families, with some of the outstanding employees who care for the residents, and with government officials. In a meeting with the minister's predecessor after the tour, I said, as I do today, that I thought that the absolute minimum standard that should apply to any single resident we proposed to move from those centres was that the care they receive after they are moved—including dentists, speech pathologists, therapy pools and a whole host of other things—should be at least equal to the care that they were receiving in any of those particular residences—without exception, equal to the care they receive today.

My question is this: Is the minister prepared to assure and to undertake to this House—and more importantly to the vulnerable people, the residents and their families—that you will guarantee that that level of care will be at least equal in every respect to what they're receiving today, if and when any of those people are moved?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his interest in people with developmental disabilities.

Yes, the closure of the institutions is taking place; it's progressing well. I want to remind him that the three parties—his party supported it too. I want to assure him that the service will be at least equal to what they are receiving, if not better.

I have also visited the three institutions—again, last Friday, I visited one group home in my riding. It never ceases to amaze me the good service that they are receiv-

ing there and also the involvement of the community around. It's heartwarming to see that they are in their community, close to their family, and that they are receiving good services, including health services.

Mr. Tory: I will agree with the minister: There are some good stories out there. But when I met with her predecessor after the tour, I also suggested to her that there may be, for some of the people with the highest needs, the need to look at another model. I want to raise that with you now, because in Nova Scotia this week they announced a new residential support program of the kind I suggested to her predecessor about a year ago. To quote the Nova Scotia minister, it provides highly specialized services for people with complex needs. It's a small, community-like setting where people are having made available to them services that maybe just couldn't be made available in a setting that would be for people with fewer needs.

I'd like to ask the minister, is she familiar with the initiative in Nova Scotia? Has she asked her officials to examine it as a possible way of addressing what I also heard on the day I was on the tour from senior officials from your ministry, namely, that for a lot of these services there are long waiting lists, so people who go to this community setting can't get the services they get in places like Huronia and Rideau today: therapy pools, speech pathology, dentists and so on? Have you looked at the possibility that some of the very high-needs, most vulnerable individuals may need a slightly different model—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: I'm pleased to remind the Leader of the Opposition that we are creating and we have created four community networks of specialized care that will coordinate support for adults with developmental disabilities who have some of the highest care needs. So we have been looking at it and we have a very nice model that is working or close to being in place in our communities.

I want to quote one of our family members who wrote to my colleague Minister Papatello: "Like other residents' family members, my sister and I had enormous fears both about the trauma of such a substantial transition and about the quality of life that John would receive in a group home.

"To our delight, John has found an exceptional residence"—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. New question, the leader of the third party.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I have a press release from Dalton McGuinty dated July 10, 2003, raising serious issues with respect to children's aid societies. I have another press release from the McGuinty government dated March 8, 2005, promis-

ing that the child advocate will be made independent and be given greater authority, saying legislation would be introduced in the spring of 2005.

We now have the auditor's report. You yourself referred to auditor's reports from 1997, 1999 and 2000. Obviously, the McGuinty government has been aware of these problems. Can you tell us why the McGuinty government has stonewalled and delayed taking action with respect to vulnerable children and the operations of children's aid societies for three and a half years now, when obviously you must have known there were serious problems?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'd like to speak about Bill 210, which is being proclaimed today, a significant, substantial review of the Child and Family Services Act. The third party actually participated, as did the official opposition, in the committee hearings and the debate on this bill. I'm really pleased that we are at the point now of proclamation of this bill, because this bill is going to increase accountability of children's aid societies, improve the complaints process, making it more timely and independent, serving the interests of the children and youth in a better fashion. It will also, very importantly, provide for more permanent placements for children and youth who are in need of protection.

Mr. Hampton: Your attempt at damage control today still isn't going to do what the Ombudsman suggests needs to happen with respect to the operations of CASs and the protection of vulnerable children. Minister, the question is why you have delayed, over a year ago, at the death of five-year-old Jeffrey Baldwin. The executive director of one of the CASs said, "This tragedy has presented us with a very powerful lesson of what can go wrong. It was the worst outcome that can happen if you don't have the safeguards in place." She called it "a collective blind spot for child welfare agencies."

My question is simple. What we've seen from the McGuinty government for over a year, two years, going into three years, has been an exercise in stonewalling and delay in terms of taking child protection, child welfare, seriously. What is the excuse? What is the justification of the McGuinty government for this delay, this stonewalling, doing nothing? While the Auditor General says—

The Deputy Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: To tell you a little bit more about the Child and Family Services Act and Bill 210: With proclamation today, we're making adoption more flexible by allowing more children to be adopted while still maintaining ties to their birth family and community. This addresses a problem that prevented more than 60% of kids from being adopted.

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We'll create more options, more legal options beyond the traditional adoption, so that children and youth in care can be placed in a permanent home. We will help resolve more cases outside the courtroom through media-

tion, a less costly, more collaborative and speedy approach. We are making it easier for relatives, including grandparents, to provide permanent homes for those children and youth who need them.

We have made these changes because we knew the current system needed to be strengthened. Bill 210 is a major accomplishment, but it is only one of the steps that our government has taken to protect children. Today, introducing legislation to establish an independent office of the child advocate is another huge step in the direction of helping to protect our children and youth.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Where my office is in Cobourg, in my riding, it shares a building with a self-help office which helps a lot of people on social assistance. I have the opportunity to meet with those folks once in a while, along with some of the clients served. Minister, I must tell you that one of the comments I get is that I'm the first MPP in the riding who ever visited that office, right next door.

Given that the holiday season is approaching, constituents in my riding are concerned that people receiving social assistance are being forgotten. Minister, what are you doing to help our most vulnerable Ontarians and vulnerable constituents in my riding?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I'd like to thank the member from Northumberland for his dedication to the most vulnerable people in our community.

This government is committed to helping people on social assistance get the supports they need to break away from poverty. Since taking office, we have taken many steps to help people on social assistance. I'm pleased to say that we have raised social assistance rates by 3% in 2005 and 2% now; we will raise it another 2%. In fact, ODSP recipients get their cheques with the 2% hike today and OW recipients will receive their 2% hike tomorrow. So we are removing barriers to employment and providing people on social assistance with more support so that they can find and keep jobs. In my supplementary, I'll go on—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Rinaldi: Thank you, Minister. Let me tell you this is welcome news. The 2% increase in social assistance rates being implemented today for ODSP recipients and tomorrow for Ontario Works is occurring several months after the commitment was made in the 2006 budget. Minister, can you explain why this has happened and how we move forward from this particular position?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Yes. When we decide on improving a social assistance rate, we would like to have it on and in the hands of those the next day, but it takes some time to work out the implementation details of an

increase to the benefit of hundreds of thousands of people across the province.

Rate increases are only one part of the picture. We have also been working hard to increase the rates to transform the way our social assistance system works. For example, we have simplified rules around earning exemptions so that the more you work, the more money you can keep. We have extended drug, dental and vision care benefits for people leaving social assistance for employment. We have increased the maximum deduction for informal child care costs from \$390 to \$600 per month. We are creating new employment benefits to help people on social assistance who are working—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. New question.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Earlier today I introduced the Owen Eisses Act, a private member's bill to install wrong-way signs and lights on the 400 series highways and on ramp entrances to those highways, like they have in British Columbia and Nova Scotia. With us today is April Sobisch and her young son, Owen Eisses, of Alliston. They were struck head-on by a wrong-way driver while travelling on Highway 400 in August 2005. Miraculously, both April and Owen survived the horrific crash, although the gentleman who hit them did die instantaneously. April has had to have several operations to enable her to walk again, and it's been a horrible ordeal for her.

Minister, this bill will help stop the carnage on our highways, which is preventable if we simply follow what other jurisdictions are doing. Will you commit to supporting my private member's bill to stop the carnage on our highways?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I thank the member for his question. I'd like to acknowledge Ms. Sobisch and express to her my sympathy for all she's gone through with this very horrific and tragic incident.

Obviously, highway safety is paramount to us. It's a priority within our government. Currently, under the Highway Traffic Act, we are able to actually enlarge the signs, and we are already reviewing the whole issue around what other jurisdictions are doing. So I'm very prepared to look at all those options and to sit down with the Ontario Provincial Police and with regional police as well to look at their recommendations on how we can improve road safety right across this province, because it is a high priority for us. I'm also very prepared to sit down with the member and with the constituent to engage in further discussion on how we can work together.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Minister, for that response. As you know, the OPP have told us that in the last six months alone, 259 wrong-way drivers have been caught in the province of Ontario just in the central region and in and around the GTA. In addition to that, since 2002, 14 people have been killed as a result of being hit head-on

by wrong-way drivers, either driving down a ramp the wrong way or driving down the highway the wrong way.

I appreciate your response and look forward to sitting down with you. I wonder if you could give us some sort of time frame, given that the incidence of wrong-way drivers and collisions has been increasing significantly in recent months, on when you'll act either on my bill or on your own initiatives to stop these accidents.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I'll act right away. Unfortunately, I can't meet with the individual this afternoon, but I'm quite prepared to go up to Alliston, because as a mom, I know what it's like to have a little four-year-old running around; it's not all that easy.

On the other hand, I will also sit down with the member opposite around the ideas that he has. I will engage the Ontario Provincial Police and the regional police, which is currently happening. As well, we are reviewing what other jurisdictions are doing. I commit to you that we will continue to do this, and we'll do this as quickly as possible. As I indicated, if we can prevent one death on our highways—hopefully we can prevent many deaths on our highways just by improving road safety. We're very open to working to that end, and we'll sit down with you right away in order to do that.

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 164

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question is for the Deputy Premier. Today Bill 164 passed second reading in this House. What is your government going to do to ensure that this bill goes to committee soon and is back in the House in the spring for third reading?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I congratulate the member opposite on the passing of his private member's bill today. I certainly look forward to an opportunity to continue to work with him and his stakeholders and others who are concerned with respect to notification.

I can tell him, as I indicated in the House the other day, that the goal of our government is to move much beyond notification and to actually take a look at removing toxins from the air, removing toxins from those products that exist. That's what we've been doing as a government, because I think it goes much beyond labelling, and we need to tackle these issues. We need to deal with prevention, and that's what we have been doing with regulation 419.

1520

Mr. Tabuns: The reality is that the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the Toronto Environmental Alliance and the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control all see this as an effective way of getting toxic substances out of consumer products. I'll go back to the minister again: What will she do to ensure that this can come to committee and come back to the House for third reading in the spring?

Hon. Ms. Broten: I'm sure my friend opposite knows that I don't hold the role of House leader on this side of the House, but I do take responsibility with respect to the Ministry of the Environment. Toughening our air standards, tackling what is truly in society and making determinations that we need to improve those standards is what we're doing at the Ministry of the Environment.

Labelling is important, and it is an important step; there's no doubt about it. But the reality is that moms across the province and moms across the country are not the scientific experts. We at the Ministry of the Environment have many of those scientific experts, and that's why this year, for the first time in 25 years, we said we are going to tackle and improve those standards. We are looking at a number of other toxins and carcinogens right now. We are moving on the best-known science, and we are making those standards tougher, because, at the end of the day, we don't want something simply to be labelled; we actually want it out of the air, out of our water and out of the ground.

IMPAIRED DRIVERS

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. As we head into the festive season, I know we're all looking very forward to the opportunity to celebrate with our family, our friends and our co-workers and to perhaps share a cup of good cheer or two. But, Minister, this morning there was yet more tragic news of another victim of drunk driving, which I know saddened everyone in this House and saddened all Ontarians. I know that many Ontarians are wondering what is being done to ensure their safety and protection in the coming weeks and months.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'd like to thank the member for the question. Unfortunately, this morning, you're right, there was another tragedy: A young woman, a mother of three, who was going to adopt another child; her life was tragically ended. The individual was charged with drunk driving. It's just totally unacceptable and completely preventable.

One of the things we're doing is that we're working very closely with the Ontario Provincial Police and the regional police around programs such as RIDE. That program actually started in Etobicoke in the early 1970s. RIDE stands for Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere. It doesn't just happen at this time of year; it actually happens all year round, but we put an emphasis on it at this time of year. Mothers Against Drunk Driving is another program.

We need to be able to get out there and say to people, "This is preventable if you simply just don't drink and drive." There are options out there for you to take another route home: public transit and Operation Red Nose, where someone will drive you home. There are so many opportunities. You do not have to get in your car and ultimately get behind the wheel—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. Smith: I appreciate all the good work that we're doing with our partners and stakeholders to make Ontario's roads safer for the holidays. However, as you mentioned and as everyone here knows, drinking and driving is a pervasive problem, not just at this time of year but all year round.

In my riding, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, through the able management of Louise Ranger, a mother herself who lost a child, organized a band challenge in the spring for all of our high school students. They all come together for a big band challenge to raise awareness about drunk driving during the festive graduation season. I usually participate in that as well.

I wonder, though, can you share with us what else this government is doing to deal with the challenge of safety on our roads and highways throughout the year?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: In addition to education and public awareness, if you blow between 0.05 and 0.08, the warm, you'll have an automatic 45-day suspension. If you blow 0.08, then you're going to have a 90-day suspension, you're going to have a mandatory education and mandatory interlock program. By the time you're through with your fine and your insurance, it's going to cost you somewhere around \$20,000 for a first-time offence. We need to be able to enforce those laws to ensure that those drunk drivers are off our roads.

Education is paramount, getting the awareness out there, but also to say that if you drink and drive, folks, you are toast. You are in fact going to suffer the severest consequences in North America. It will cost you up to \$20,000 and may in fact take your driver's licence away for a good 10 years or more.

So don't drink and drive. There are alternatives. Think before you get in that car. As they say—and I say it to all my friends in the House—don't cross the stupid line.

CROWN FIBRE EXPORTS

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, can you tell me why MNR staff in northeastern Ontario don't follow your ministry's own guideline for exporting crown fibre out of the province? I have an e-mail from an operator in Timmins and he says, "Crown and private wood flows to Quebec from across northeastern Ontario are increasing at an alarming rate. This fibre is an important part of the fibre supply both from a cost and volume perspective as Ontario mills work to remain or return to profitability. There is something very wrong with our government for allowing this to happen."

Minister, can you tell me why MNR staff in northeastern Ontario don't follow your ministry's own guideline for exporting crown fibre out of the province?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): First of all, I'd say to the member that Ontario is a net importer of logs from many jurisdictions, including Quebec. But in this particular instance in Timmins, there is a labour dispute in a mill. If I were to say that the wood no longer

could be harvested because it is not in demand at that particular operation, I would be putting our woodworkers who harvest and haul the logs into these mills out of work. So we're allowing the cutting to go on, and right now there is a mill in Quebec that can take some of this wood. That keeps the bush workers working right now, just before Christmas. So while, on one hand, there's a labour dispute, I don't want to put more people out of work.

Mr. Miller: Minister, I'm hearing directly from companies in northeastern Ontario who have allocations of crown fibre. Operators tell me they want the fibre, but they don't necessarily want to cut it this year. Your guidelines require that the harvesters get letters of rejection from local companies that have a crown allocation, and then the harvester should make an application for an export permit. Only then should the harvester be allowed to ship crown fibre out of Ontario.

In northwestern Ontario, the MNR does follow an export permitting process, but your staff in northeastern Ontario say they don't really follow any guidelines. Minister, these operators are losing access to crown fibre that they've been allocated. This is fibre that is closest to their operations and therefore fibre that is most economical for them because it's closest to their plants. Your ministry's unwillingness to follow these guidelines is going to kill more forestry jobs or ensure that those people who are already laid off aren't going to be called back.

Minister, will you take action today to ensure that your guidelines for crown fibre export are implemented by your staff in northeastern Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I would say to the member that I will ensure that our staff are following and complying with guidelines. They need to be doing that, and I will certainly look into that and make sure that is happening.

I would say in regard to the producer there, if that producer is no longer consuming that wood, then basically the wood could be consumed elsewhere. Once that production gets back up and running, the wood is going to be there that they would have had in that time period and the wood will flow to the mill. They're not going to be losing any production other than their being shut down because they've got a labour dispute. So they're not going to lose any material when they need it. It will be there, available for them, once they commence production.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): My question is for Minister Caplan. Minister, yesterday at the government agencies committee, I, along with the Conservative members of the committee, voted to reconvene the committee to expressly examine allegations of inappropriate practices at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. The Liberal members on that committee voted against the motion.

Minister, first it was anomalies in the number of major prizes being won by lottery retailers. Next it was problems with the high potential for insider fraud and cheating on scratch-and-win tickets. Then we found that the OLGC allows scratch-and-win tickets to be sold when the grand prizes that are advertised have already been won.

All of these scandals, Mr. Minister, point to major structural problems with OLGC that require a full, transparent investigation. My question is, why has your government prevented the government agencies committee from holding hearings to investigate these problems at OLGC to finally get to the bottom of this mess?

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Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): In fact, the member is quite mistaken. It was this government that finally allowed the government agencies committee to take a look at the OLGC, and I know that this member has been on that committee and in fact had a chance to speak with Chair Michael Gough and the president and CEO, Mr. Brown, along with other members of that all-party committee. But it didn't just stop there.

The Ombudsman, an independent officer of this Legislature, is undertaking an independent review based on many of the comments the member has made. I want you to know that I trust the officer of this Legislature, Mr. Marin, to get to the bottom of these allegations. But it doesn't just stop there.

The chair of the board has engaged KPMG, one of Canada's leading forensic audit companies, to also undertake a review and an investigation.

We have an all-party legislative committee which has undertaken an investigation, an independent officer of this Legislature and one of Canada's leading forensic audit firms. That's transparency, and that's why this government has taken quick and decisive action.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario government already fully funds 93% of faith-based schools in Ontario, but the remaining 7% receive no funding, solely because they are not Catholic;

"Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled in 1999 and again in 2005 that this arrangement is discriminatory and violates basic international human rights law that Ontario formally agreed to uphold;

"Whereas all three parties represented in the Legislature support Catholic separate school funding, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Canada, so that the only fair and viable solution to the discrimination is to

extend funding to the small religious minorities that are currently excluded;

"Whereas the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Ontario has the constitutional power to provide funding to non-Catholic faith-based schools;

"Whereas Ontario is the only western democracy that fully funds faith-based schools of one religion to the total exclusion of all other religions, while all other provinces except the Atlantic provinces fund faith-based schools and have thriving public school systems;

"Whereas the cultural survival of the affected minority groups is at stake;

"Whereas faith-based schools produce responsible and productive citizens; and

"Whereas the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Religious Schools in December 2004 submitted to the Minister of Education a detailed proposal for the funding of non-Catholic faith-based schools in a manner that is fair and accountable and protects and enhances the public interest;

"We call on the Ontario Legislature to pass legislation to provide equitable funding in respect of all faith-based schools in Ontario without religious discrimination and without any reduction in funding for public education, with accountability requirements and standards in place to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded."

I present this petition on behalf of many parents for equity in education who have signed this petition.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have a petition entitled "Grant Ombudsman Oversight of Children's Aid Societies."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

"Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

"Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people's complaints about children's aid societies' ... decisions; and

"Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman's office;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies...."

Obviously I agree with this and I affix my signature thereto.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I have a petition from the Canadian Federation of University Women.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

“Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

“Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

“We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement.”

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): “Petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

“Whereas Longfields and Davidson Heights in south Nepean are some of the fastest-growing communities in Ottawa and Ontario; and

“Whereas the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board has voted to authorize the final design phases for a grade 7 to 12 school to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has lifted a three-year moratorium on school closings in order to make way for new educational facilities;

“We, residents of Nepean–Carleton, petition the Parliament of Ontario to ensure that the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board continues with plans to build a new grade 7 to 12 school no later than autumn of 2008 to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities.”

I affix my signature. I also want to thank the Minister of Education for keeping me briefed on this.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition signed by 416 people who live in the riding of Nickel Belt. It was sent to me by Anne Deveau of Levack, Ontario. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government were elected based on their promise to rebuild public services in Ontario;

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close the Rideau Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities,

many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing the Rideau Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities;

“Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of the Rideau Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep the Rideau Regional Centre open as a home for people with developmental disabilities and to maintain it as a ‘centre of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live.”

I’ve affixed my signature to this.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I’ve got a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It’s “Access to Trades and Professions in Ontario.” It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

“Whereas action by Ontario’s trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario’s trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario’s regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario’s employers, Ontario’s newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families.”

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "Whereas the Ontario government already fully funds 93% of faith-based schools in Ontario, but the remaining 7% receive no funding, solely because they are not Catholic;

"Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled in 1999 and again in 2005 that this arrangement is discriminatory and violates basic international human rights law that Ontario formally agreed to uphold;
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"Whereas all three parties represented in the Legislature support Catholic separate school funding, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Canada, so that the only fair and viable solution to the discrimination is to extend funding to the small religious minorities that are currently excluded;

"Whereas the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Ontario has the constitutional power to provide funding to non-Catholic faith-based schools;

"Whereas Ontario is the only western democracy that fully funds faith-based schools of one religion to the total exclusion of all other religions, while all other provinces except the Atlantic provinces fund faith-based schools and have thriving public school systems;

"Whereas the cultural survival of the affected minority groups is at stake;

"Whereas faith-based schools produce responsible and productive citizens; and

"Whereas the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Religious Schools in December 2004 submitted to the Minister of Education a detailed proposal for the funding of non-Catholic faith-based schools in a manner that is fair and accountable and protects and enhances the public interest;

"We call on the Ontario Legislature to pass legislation to provide equitable funding in respect of all faith-based schools in Ontario without religious discrimination and without any reduction in funding for public education, with accountability requirements and standards in place to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded."

I agree with this petition and I will give it to young Philip Spencer here, who I know went to Timothy Christian School in Barrie.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT
SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that's been sent to me by the Canadian Federation of University Women, the Haliburton Highlands chapter, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

This is submitted by the Guelph chapter of the CFUW.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): "Petition to Ontario Legislature to End Discrimination

"Whereas the Ontario government already fully funds 93% of faith-based schools in Ontario, but the remaining 7% receive no funding, solely because they are not Catholic;

"Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled in 1999 and again in 2005 that this arrangement is discriminatory and violates basic international human rights law that Ontario formally agreed to uphold;

"Whereas all three parties represented in the Legislature support Catholic separate school funding, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Canada, so that the only fair and viable solution to the discrimination is to extend funding to the small religious minorities that are currently excluded;

"Whereas the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Ontario has the constitutional power to provide funding to non-Catholic faith-based schools;

"Whereas Ontario is the only western democracy that fully funds faith-based schools of one religion to the total exclusion of all other religions, while all other provinces except the Atlantic provinces fund faith-based schools and have thriving public school systems;

"Whereas the cultural survival of the affected minority groups is at stake;

"Whereas faith-based schools produce responsible and productive citizens; and

"Whereas the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Religious Schools in December 2004 submitted to the Minister of Education a detailed proposal for the funding of non-Catholic faith-based schools in a manner that is fair and accountable and protects and enhances the public interest;

"We call on the Ontario Legislature to pass legislation to provide equitable funding in respect of all faith-based schools in Ontario without religious discrimination and without any reduction in funding for public education, with accountability requirements and standards in place to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded."

I'm pleased to support this recommendation.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas, in June 2003, Dalton McGuinty said Ontario Liberals are committed to ensuring that nursing home residents receive more personal care each day and will reinstate minimum standards, and inspectors will be required to audit the staff-to-resident ratios; and

"Whereas Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, in October 2004, said that the Ontario government will not set a specified number of care hours nursing home residents are to receive each day; and

"Whereas Ontario nursing home residents still receive the lowest number of care hours in the Western world; and

"Whereas studies have indicated nursing home residents should receive at least 4.1 hours of nursing care per day; and

"Whereas a coroner's jury in April 2005 recommended the Ontario government establish a minimum number of care hours nursing home residents must receive each day;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario immediately enact a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of nursing care for each nursing home resident per day."

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary

obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

I agree with these petitioners, and I affix my signature on the petition as well.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): Pursuant to standing order 55, I rise to give the Legislature the business of the House for next week.

On Monday, December 4, 2006, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 107, the Human Rights Code Amendment Act; it says for the evening TBC, so that's a TBC.

Tuesday, December 5, 2006, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 151, the Budget Measures Act (No. 2).

Wednesday, December 6, 2006, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 52, the Education Amendment Act (Learning to Age 18).

Thursday, December 7, 2006, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 28, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act.

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 14, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 62, An Act to amend the Election Finances Act and the Legislative Assembly Act / Projet de loi 62, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le financement des élections et la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): When I first looked at this bill, I must admit I was rather perplexed: It was debated so long ago, it came up for one day of hearings and then it simply disappeared from the radar. I'm really quite perplexed, because I don't even remember having seen it the first time through. I don't know where I was, but obviously it came up so fast and disappeared so fast that I didn't think it would ever see the light of day again. Here it is before the Legislature again this afternoon.

I am very perplexed. One has to be perplexed at why the government sees fit to bring this bill back. It seemed to me that the Supreme Court of Canada, in the Figueroa case, looked at exactly what is being proposed here today and struck it down as unconstitutional. It appears to me that the Supreme Court of Canada said that what the federal Parliament was trying to do in terms of political parties and the law they were trying to establish for Canada was struck down as unconstitutional. Now we have the government of Ontario trying to put in through the back door a similar type of law that purports to restrict the number of candidates, or set a minimum on the number of candidates a political party must have in order to be registered. I can only quote Justice Iacobucci: "Forcing a party to meet any threshold for candidates may contravene the charter."

I know that this government in this bill has set the limit spectacularly low, at two candidates, but the learned justice said, and I quote again, "Forcing a party to meet any threshold for candidates may contravene the charter." So whether it is 50%, as the law now exists, or whether it is two candidates, as this government proposes, it may be in violation of the charter of Canada. I must state that I am perplexed as to why this government is proceeding, in view of the very strong statements made by the Supreme Court of Canada.

I looked at the bill and thought, "What else is in the bill?" Quite frankly, this is a very, very limited bill. It reduces to two candidates or 1,000 signatures the 50% of ridings having to have a candidate from a particular party and/or 10,000 signatures before they are registered. It also requires the party leaders of any number of parties in Ontario to submit a form annually indicating that their fundamental purpose is electing MPPs. Last but not least, it allows the Chief Election Officer to deregister a party if it does not have candidates in at least two electoral districts in a general election.

At first I thought, this is better than the old law, so why wouldn't we support it? But in looking at the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, I cannot support it and I cannot imagine that anyone in this Legislature, if you're familiar with what the Supreme Court has said on this very issue, would support a bill such as this.

I'd like to go through what they had to say. I ask the members just to look at how the decision made on a federally constituted bill coming out of Ottawa, reflecting

on all of Canada, is in many ways identical to what is being put here. Do the learned justice's words not ring just as true for what we're doing here as for what was happening in Canada?

The first one was the right to vote: whether the right is a "meaningful participation" for citizens. The learned justice said as follows: "The fundamental purpose of section 3, in my view, is to promote and protect the right of each citizen to play a meaningful role in the political life of the country. Absence of such a right, ours would not be a true democracy."

So he said that everything flows from the right of an individual to participate. Everything flows from section 3 of the charter, which promotes and protects "the right of each citizen to play a meaningful role in the political life of the country."

He went on in very learned discourse to talk about whether or not other democratic concerns could trump the right to "meaningful participation." He went on: "Legislation that purports to encourage the aggregation of political preferences might advance certain collective interests, but it does not benefit all citizens, namely, those whose interests are not aggregated by the mainstream political parties."

That is, again, exactly what we have here in Ontario. Although the number of parties is being limited, it still has a number. What the learned Justice Iacobucci—I hope I got it right that time—said is: "Legislation that purports to encourage the aggregation of political preferences might advance certain collective interests, but it does not benefit all citizens, namely, those whose interests are not aggregated by the mainstream political parties." If you happen to believe in the dictates, the mandates or the policies of the Marijuana Party, the Confederation of Regions Party, the Communist Party of Canada, the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist), or any of the plethora of parties that may be out there and may still continue to exist or may exist for the first time in the future, this shows that you are not being aided by the charter.

He goes on to talk about smaller parties being legitimate democratic options. I quote him again in his decision. He writes: "Large or small, all political parties are capable of introducing unique interests and concerns into the political discourse. Consequently, all political parties, whether large or small, are capable of acting as a vehicle for the participation of individual citizens in the public discourse that animates the determination of social policy." He's saying that it doesn't matter if you belong to one of the big three parties or the big four parties or the big five parties in Canada; you can belong to or you can support any of the parties—each one of them, large or small, is capable of introducing unique interests—and that the citizen has the right to cling to those parties, to support those parties, to finance those parties, and it cannot, under ordinary circumstances, be abrogated.

In conclusion—because I don't want to get too legal on this—he goes on to say: "Voters who select smaller parties make a meaningful choice that should be

respected.” Here’s where it comes down to the meat of it all. He writes, and I’m going to quote a couple of sentences in their totality: “Participation as a voter is not only about the selection of elected representatives. Irrespective of its effect on the outcome of an election, a vote for a particular candidate is an expression of support for a particular approach or platform. Whether that vote contributes to the election of a candidate or not, each vote in support of that approach or platform increases the likelihood that the issues and concerns underlying that platform will be taken into account by those who ultimately implement policy, if not now then perhaps at some point in the future.”

He goes on to canvass some of the arguments. Of course, the government of Canada sent their legal experts before the Supreme Court of Canada, and they made all kinds of arguments as to why their bill should be allowed to go forward. In fact, they only made three arguments. The three arguments they made, which were all ultimately shot down as being meaningless—with the greatest of respect to the people who thought them up—were: “(i) to improve the effectiveness of the electoral process; (ii) to protect the integrity of the electoral financing regime; and (iii) to ensure that the process is able to deliver a viable outcome for our form of responsible government.” The Supreme Court, in its wisdom, shot all of those down. They were not legitimate arguments that would support the bill that was passed by the House of Commons.

They said, quite candidly: “There is no connection ... between the 50-candidate threshold and the objective of improving the electoral process through the public financing of political parties.” I would put it to the members opposite that there is no connection whatsoever between the two-candidate threshold and the objective of improving the electoral process through the public financing of political parties, because there is nothing different. The number is the only thing that separates what is attempted in this bill and what was attempted in Ottawa.

It goes on to say: “If the right of individual citizens to play a meaningful role in the electoral process is to be limited for fiscal reasons, the savings would have to be much more substantial than those associated with the restriction on the right of non-registered parties to issue tax receipts to individual citizens for donations received outside the election period.”

1600

This is identical to what is happening here, because if you run two candidates, then what this bill says is that you’re going to be deregistered. What the Supreme Court has said is that that, in itself, cannot be a rationale for doing so.

In the end, it all comes down to a few words: Would eliminating the threshold make majority governments less likely? That was the argument that was made. You limit these people and you’re going to make more majority governments. I don’t know; I guess governments in power always want to have a majority.

The learned justice went on to say that even if it did, it would not be justified, that, “The legislation fails the third branch of the proportionality test: the proportionate effects test. The government has failed to demonstrate that the salutary benefits of the legislation outweigh its deleterious effects.”

I looked at this bill; I looked at the bill that was in Ottawa. The numbers are different but what is purported to happen with those numbers is identical. I am shocked that the government lawyers, the members opposite, many of whom are legally trained, would not heed the Supreme Court of Canada’s advice when drafting this bill. I am quite surprised that they expect that this bill will pass, unassailed, through this Legislature and not be challenged by the selfsame parties that challenged it in the Supreme Court of Canada.

The Figueroa case was named after the leader at that time—I don’t know whether he still is—of the Communist Party of Canada. They were the ones who launched the challenge, they were the ones who won the challenge, and everything that was attempted to have been done under the federal legislation is now undone.

I looked again at the bill and I thought: What else is the bill supposed to do? The bill makes it mandatory that the party leaders annually submit a form indicating that their fundamental purpose is electing MPPs. With the greatest of respect, any first-year student of political science can tell you that that is only one of the functions of a political party. A political party exists to formulate policy. A political party exists to elect members. A political party exists to have a leadership. A political party exists for education purposes. A political party exists to recruit new members. A political party exists for any number of functions, and only one of those functions is, as it says here, for the fundamental purpose of electing MPPs. I would think that this too will be challenged. Anybody will be able to challenge it with a first-year political science book that lists the 10 or 12 functions that a political party in all democracies, and even in non-democracies, undertakes. This is clearly not good law.

The last one: The Chief Election Officer is required to deregister a party if it does not have candidates in at least two electoral districts in a general election.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Is a quorum present?

The Deputy Speaker: Is a quorum present?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Todd Decker): Quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table: Quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’m glad that members have come forward to listen to the balance of my speech.

There was so much more that can and should be debated around this particular bill. As I said, I am quite surprised that the bill contains the mandate that it does

and that the bill purports to do something which has already been ruled unconstitutional. Would that this government had contained within the body of the bill something that actually strengthened the political parties. Would that, within the body of the bill, in preparing for the bill, they had actually involved the political parties.

There are a number of political parties registered in Ontario at this time. I am not sure how many of them ran two or more candidates in the last election. Certainly we know that the big three did. We know the Liberals ran a full slate. We know the Conservatives ran a full slate in 103 ridings. We know the New Democratic Party ran a full slate. But there were other parties as well. I think the Green Party may have run a full slate. I know they ran it federally in the last election. But we have the Freedom Party, the Family Coalition Party, the Confederation of Regions Party, the Libertarian Party and the Communist Party all registered in the province of Ontario. I would hazard a guess that we probably have a number of much smaller parties as well. The Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist), I know still exists. I don't know if the Marijuana Party or the Rhinoceros Party is still around.

I want to say that we attempted to find out whether or not any of these parties that exist in Ontario were contacted in the preparation of this particular bill, particularly the smaller ones, whether they were consulted on the number of signatures they would have to get or the fact that they would have to run two candidates or the fact that they would have to swear a statement each and every year that their primary purpose is the election of members of Parliament.

We know that none of that was done, and we know that for that reason this bill is fraught with difficulties. It is fraught with difficulties because it does not take very much for a gentleman like Mr. Figueroa of the Communist Party of Canada to completely derail the government of Canada and its lawyers before the Supreme Court of Canada on the unfairness of their bill, and it's not going to take very much for these selfsame people to do the same thing in the Supreme Court of Ontario or, through the Supreme Court of Canada, to unravel this bill as well.

This bill is just simply bad legislation. I personally do not have any great difficulty with lowering the numbers from 50% to 2%, but I do say that I will not be supporting a bill which I believe at the outset is unconstitutional. I do not know, and I did not have the opportunity on the opening day to hear, what the minister had to say about this, but I am given to understand that this is some kind of a compromise to make it easier so that it might better withstand some kind of constitutional challenge. Would that it didn't have to do that at all.

A party exists simply because a party is. A party exists because a group of like-minded people get together and believe in the principles of that party and want to establish it in whatever format best meets their needs, whether that is to elect people, whether it is to educate people around policies and platforms, whether it is to agitate for change or whether it is simply to be a protest

movement, as at one time the CCF was described in western Canada. It was more of a movement than a party until it actually decided to start running candidates.

None of that is here, and I am afraid that this government overstepped its bounds. Would that they had done something else; would that they had looked at the legislation that is essential to get change taking place in Ontario, to strengthen the political parties, to fund the political parties, to make it so that the political parties have a real say in proportionality within this Legislature.

We have another bill before the House which has caused some great consternation from a great many groups in Ontario related to the referendum that is going to take place in October next year. In that bill, this government has set impossibly high standards at 60%. However, in this bill, they choose to do something which is clearly and will probably, in all likelihood, be found to be illegal.

I don't know where this government is going on all of this. They ran in the last election saying they were going to democratize this House, and failed to do so. They ran in the last election saying they were going to include members of all parties in making decisions, particularly at the committee stage, and to a very great extent have failed to do so.

They have run on a campaign of having ordinary citizens have more input. We saw what happened on Bill 107 last week, where those ordinary citizens were guillotined right out from making their presentations—they had put their names down since last July and they were not given an opportunity—and all the ill feeling that took place here yesterday.

1610

I looked at this bill—and I ask the members opposite to go back to your lawyers. Can this withstand a constitutional challenge? I doubt it. If it can't, I don't know why we're debating it in this Legislature, because to make a bad law is tantamount to having the courts overturn it as soon as it gets out of this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): I listened to the speech from the member for Beaches–East York. I can assure all members of this House that the bill is consistent with the Constitution Act, 1982, and with the Constitution Act, 1867. Under the old law, in order to be a party you basically need to be running candidates in about 50 seats, or you need to have the signatures of 10,000 voters. Now, under this bill, you need to have candidates in two seats—from 50 down to two. In order to be a party, you need to have more than one person; you need to have two people. So the argument is, in order to be a party, you can't just be running in one seat; you need to be running in at least two seats. This is surely the minimal numerical standard for establishing a party, unless the member wants to argue that under the Constitution a party of one suffices. I think that this is reasonable.

I also think that having minimal standards for being a party strikes a balance between, on the one hand, not

trivializing the importance of party status within our electoral system, while at the same time ensuring that there is freedom and flexibility and different understandings and respect for democracy in terms of establishing a party.

So I cannot imagine—and I'm sure the member will speak to this—how it is that having a minimum requirement of two people to form a party under the laws of Ontario is inconsistent with the Constitution. But I can assure the member that this is worth debating, that this is consistent with our Constitution and that this is a worthy change to our electoral laws in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): I somewhat agree with the member for Beaches–East York that this is kind of a strange bill. You're going to have every kook in the province forming a party. I don't mind saying that because that's exactly what's going to happen; I'm sorry, Attorney General: every two kooks in the province forming a party. I thought the reason we had 10,000 votes or at least 50% of the seats you had to run candidates was that parties had to be serious and they had to be showing they had public support before they waste our tax dollars and get on every ballot in the province because they're two kooks. Mr. Speaker, you will remember we had prisoners who were exercising rights out of prison that they shouldn't have been exercising, and they were crazy. Finally, people cracked down on that. I remember when I used to work for Perrin Beatty, the prisoners used to write him all the time. They had more privileges than he did as a member of Parliament, including the right to vote. I could go on and on.

I don't know why you're doing this. I guess the government, as Mr. Prue said, also has Bill 155, the Electoral System Referendum Act, which is just complete nonsense. You're trying to fulfill a campaign promise by saying you're bound by that act if the citizens' assembly comes up with change, and of course they will. They've got umpteen months together, locked up in rooms, and it's natural, it's human nature that they're going to come up with changes. They're not going to come back and say "Don't change the system."

I don't know why we want to change the system. We live in the best country in the world, in the best province in that country. We are the most prosperous people who have ever lived in humankind and we have the best democratic system, and you want to change it all. You want to change it all because you tried to convince people in the last election that it was all screwed up. Well, it isn't all screwed up. It's not screwed up at all. You Americanized the system by going to fixed election dates. Stop messing around with our system. Long before you were the government and long after you won't be the government, it will still be the best system in the world, as long as you stop screwing around with it.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's certainly my pleasure to make a few remarks about the member from Beaches–East York's speech on Bill 62. I have to say, my personal experience with party status is a very unique one in that the by-election in Hamilton East, some

may recall, was what brought party status back to the New Democratic Party caucus here at Queen's Park. I was very proud to be one of the people who made that happen for the NDP.

I think the member from Beaches–East York has brought forward to the debate today issues that need to be considered by the government. There are many specifics that need to be reviewed in the committee process, but nonetheless there are instances of these issues being reviewed by the courts currently in Canada, as the member from Beaches–East York has indicated. There are concerns he has raised in referring to that process around a number of different pieces that smaller parties bring. For example, is there a threshold? The Attorney General says that there isn't really one in this bill, although there's one written in ink; so there is one. Whether or not it's necessary, I think, becomes the issue. Is it necessary to put that in black and white or isn't it? Perhaps it's splitting hairs, perhaps it isn't, but certainly the opportunity to debate that, to determine whether or not it is in fact appropriate to have that in the bill, is an important matter for the members of this Legislature.

So there's some work that needs to be done on this bill, and Mr. Kormos, the member from Niagara Centre, as well as Mr. Prue, the member for Beaches–East York, have put on the record a number of issues the New Democrats would like to see fleshed out.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I thought I would speak about the second reading of Bill 62, and I realize we're deviating a little bit on the bill. So I thought I'd remind people that this legislation is a key part of our strategy to make democracy stronger and not to question people on what their motive is to run.

I welcome these proposed changes, because I think political parties are one of the vehicles that citizens have to participate in the democratic system, and we need to make it easier to register smaller parties so that people can participate and they aren't intimidated. We want them to be encouraged and we want diversity. We want different people and different people's voices at the table. It's important that we have them there. We end up with better legislation, better policies when different voices end up at those tables.

Using the provisions of this bill, new parties could run, as was said earlier, by endorsing at least two candidates. Outside the campaign period, the parties could register by providing the Chief Election Officer with a petition signed by at least 1,000 people. That's a pretty intimidating process. That's not something that you do on a whim. That's something that would take some effort and some thought for somebody who is serious about making sure that we consider another point of view. We need to make it easier to register so that we end up with better representation and a full diversity of people across the province. The registration in Ontario entitles political parties to receive a number of benefits. That's important. It's different from a municipal campaign. It's part of provincial legislation that includes the ability to solicit contributions, to issue tax receipts. That's important

when you're running as a new candidate. It's important to be able to get that assistance in helping you run. It helps you also to get a permanent register of the list of the electors. It puts you on a level playing field. It's important to do that. That's what we're trying to do with this legislation. We're trying to make democracy easy, hands on, affordable and manageable.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Beaches–East York, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Prue: I thank everyone for listening attentively to my speech: the Attorney General, the member from Simcoe–Grey, the member from Hamilton East and the member from Brampton Centre.

To the Attorney General: I would gladly be persuaded, except that it was very clear from the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada that forcing a party to meet any threshold for candidates may contravene the charter. I would agree with you, and I think everyone who looks at this would agree, that having 50% of the ridings needing to be covered with a candidate is far less democratic than only having two. But the fact that you have still set a number may cause difficulties; it may cause a contravention of the charter.

I am not so glib or so happy that I can just say, "Of course this will meet a constitutional challenge," because I thought the last one, the one in Ottawa, would have met the constitutional challenge as well, with the whole body of lawyers that the government of Canada was able to send to defend its position, only to lose it. I have to say again: When you are setting up this legislation—and for sure it is going to be faced with the same constitutional challenge that was faced federally—then you ought to make sure, really sure, that it meets the Constitution, yes, because the Supreme Court said that forcing a party to meet any threshold for candidates may contravene the charter. That threshold can be one or two or five or 50; any threshold may contravene it, and two is a threshold. I understand why the government has chosen two: It's the least number you can choose other than one. I understand that. Okay.

In the end, political parties do more than simply run elections. This legislation contravenes what any political science student will tell you: Political parties have a whole bigger role than simply running candidates.

1620

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Chudleigh: You know, two people isn't a party, it's a date. It's a very serious matter. If they become a political party, they have access to the electorate list, the list of electors. That is something that can be abused. We have to sign papers when we get that. If that's available to people, these things can be abused; they can be misused. There are all kinds of things that people can do with the electorate list. Good heavens, we've gone to great lengths in the last five years to protect our privacy, and I think those are good things. The way people use lists—it's important that people have some security that their names aren't going to be bandied about.

Perhaps even more importantly, a political party can issue tax receipts. Those are something that have to be

very, very carefully looked after and balanced, and that, I think, could be open to abuse as well. A legitimate political party is extremely careful about how they handle their receipts, how they solicit funds, how they collect monies. They're very careful because there is one true way to death in politics and that's to be seen to be abusing the money that's being collected. We've seen that in this House. We've seen that with a former member who bought a suit with taxpayers' collective money. We saw the abuse that was heaped on that member, even though that member did a very adequate job. In private, I might be more congratulatory than that, but he did an adequate job in his portfolio as Minister of Economic Development and Trade. So lowering the standards down to where there are only two people who form a party seems to me to be taking it to an extreme that is far beyond the level of where we might want to go as a society.

What could happen with this bill, I suppose, is that the current statute—the current requirement is that a party that wants to become a provincial party has to have members in 50% of the ridings across Ontario. In the next election, I guess it would be 53 ridings. They would have to run candidates in 53 ridings across the province of Ontario in contesting a general election. If an election is not being held, they must submit a petition with the names and addresses and signatures of 10,000 eligible electors endorsing the registration of the party. The fact that they needed 10,000 when the Election Finances Act was passed or amended, the fact that 10,000 signatures were needed, gives you an indication of how important and how integral the creation of a party is to our system. The fact that 10,000 eligible electors endorse a registration might be adjusted. That might be adjusted downward somewhat, but I would argue that it shouldn't be adjusted too low. I would suggest that if they go down to 1,000 eligible electors, where this bill is suggesting they go to today, I think that's a little low. I think there's something in between that might be found to be acceptable.

The bill also lowers the threshold so that new parties are required to nominate candidates only in two ridings, as opposed to 50% or 53 ridings in Ontario. Again, I think this is too low. This is where two people who can register in two different ridings can form a party. I say again, that is not a party; two people are a date.

And 1,000 is something that—as any of us who have ever collected signatures on a petition know, getting people to sign petitions isn't the most difficult thing in the world to do. You can stand in the mall and get signatures on a petition with some rapidity. It's not all that onerous. But 1,000 signatures—it wouldn't take much of a conviction on the part of someone to say, "I want this political party," and 1,000 signatures would be fairly easy to come by. I would suggest it must be much higher than that.

At \$200 a candidate for registration, again, \$200 is—I don't want to say it's not a lot of money, but it's not significant. Quite frankly, I think that number is probably about right. I don't think a dollar sign should perhaps enter into the formulation of a political party.

It's interesting that this bill is coming forward today. We're debating this in the Legislature. We haven't seen it for some time, but we're debating it in the Legislature today instead of Bill 107, which we could have had more time on. I don't know if this bill is going to see the light of day at the end of the session, but Bill 107, which is not being debated in the House today and is not being heard in committee, has had a few hiccups, of course. Today in committee—yesterday. It was yesterday; sorry. Yesterday in committee, the committee deleted, I think, the first section of the bill, and it had to be corrected. It's of serious concern to the people of Ontario, because there is a large number of people who are not going to be heard on Bill 107. They are not—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Halton, you were correct: We are not debating Bill 107 today; we are debating Bill 62.

Mr. Chudleigh: It's a shame we're not debating Bill 107. Instead of debating the Election Finances Act, we could be debating Bill 107.

The Election Finances Act, which hasn't been seen in this House for quite some time, all of a sudden, here it is. It comes in at a time in the election calendar that is a critical time in the House. It's a critical time, when the government is bringing forward its agenda, and yet here is a bill that hasn't been heard for a number of weeks—months, I think, since this bill has been discussed. I'm not sure it's on the government agenda. I'm not sure it is ever going to see the light of day.

It's surprising that the government would bring this piece of legislation forward in debate when the House could be debating more serious pieces of legislation, such as Bill 107, which has been guillotined by this government and is no longer before the House, no longer before committee. It's a shame that so many people in Ontario who wanted to speak to that bill aren't able to do so because of this government's actions.

The time in which this is coming forward, again, is interesting, in that the last couple of weeks of the House before the adjournment just before Christmas always brings out the best that a government has, because they want to go out and talk to the electorate about what they've done and accomplished. Yet here is this bill coming before the House at this time, instead of Bill 107. I think Bill 107 should be the one that we are discussing in some degree, because the foundation of our province, of human rights, is something that is very, very important. If we're not going to discuss that, I think we shouldn't discuss anything. I move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1630 to 1700.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Chudleigh has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour, please stand and be counted by the Clerks.

All those opposed, please stand and be counted by the Clerks.

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 6; the nays are 25.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

The member from Halton has the floor.

Mr. Chudleigh: It's not the numbers that matter when you feel something strongly. This debate is taking place because Bill 107 isn't being discussed in this House, and Bill 107—

The Deputy Speaker: Member from Halton, we're going to start out the right way. We're not going there. You're going to discuss Bill 62 or you won't be discussing anything at all.

Mr. Chudleigh: Mr. Speaker, if I'm not allowed to discuss Bill 107, which this—

Interjection.

Mr. Chudleigh: The Attorney General wants to guess. I think he may be right. If we're not allowed to discuss this bill, which is critical to Ontario's—

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I understand what the member's trying to say, and I dare him to ring the bells.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Halton.

Mr. Chudleigh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I may just make the members pay for this.

This bill, quite frankly, which I have talked about earlier, is what we refer to in politics and in this House as perhaps a piece of fluff, because it is not a serious piece of legislation. Can you imagine two people in Ontario forming a party? Two people in Ontario is not a party; it's a date. If you want to go on a date, get two people. Incidentally, when you get two people and you go on a date, then you can issue tax receipts. How ridiculous is that? How ridiculous would you say it is that two people on a date can all of a sudden issue tax receipts, they can collect money, they can solicit funds? It's a ridiculous piece of legislation. We're not discussing Bill 107, and I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1704 to 1734.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Chudleigh has moved adjournment of the House.

All those in favour, please rise and be counted by the Clerk.

All those opposed, please rise and be counted.

The Deputy Clerk: The ayes are 5; the nays are 25.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Mr. Chudleigh: It's a sad day in the Legislature when we're here to discuss a bill that will never see the light of day. The government is just bringing it in in order to kill time. This government is out of ideas. They're out of

ideas, they're out of initiatives, and they're bringing in this bill.

We all know that two people forming a political party in this country does not promote democracy. Two people are not a party; two people are a date. The Attorney General is nodding his head. He knows that two people are a date, not—

Hon. Mr. Bryant: Unless you're an accountant.

Mr. Chudleigh: Unless you're an accountant. An accountant needs three people for a party, or one?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: One's enough.

Mr. Chudleigh: One's enough for a date, according to the Attorney General.

But while we're discussing this bill, there are 38 groups of people, many people, who are not being heard on Bill 107. If we're not going to discuss Bill 107 today in this House, I don't think we should be debating anything in this House, so I'm going to sit down.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Prue: This was indeed an entertaining presentation from the member from Halton. I listened intently to what he had to say. Of course, he wanted to talk about other bills, and I don't blame him for wanting to talk about those other bills because they're very dear to his heart.

But in terms of this bill and what he had to say about the bill, I would gladly agree with him. Many of his sentiments are probably very commonplace in the province of Ontario and with the people of Canada in terms of what constitutes a political party, how a political party of two really can't be a political party and all of those things. However, I would have to beg to differ. As I said in my own debate, the Supreme Court of Canada has already weighed in heavily on this particular issue. It said that the—

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: No. The Supreme Court of Canada is supreme when it comes to the law and to the Constitution. In terms of the Constitution, the Supreme Court has weighed in and has said quite clearly that you cannot artificially set the number of people or the number of people seeking office that constitutes a political party. This government in turn has chosen to do that.

I cannot accept the argument of the member from Halton, although I do appreciate the passion with which he delivered that argument. I do appreciate that he gave all of us a little respite from this room in order to get our collective wits about us and that he felt it necessary to bring some kind of clarity to the position he wanted to take.

I would just remind the member, though, that indeed the germination of most political parties starts out very, very small. In fact, many of the great parties of the world started out with little more than a single individual or a small cadre of individuals who developed the party to the point where it would one day have power. I think that's what we need to look at as well.

Mr. Levac: What has been unfortunate about this debate so far is that we've got one group that is saying it's not enough, and then we've got another group that's

saying it's too much, in terms of the bodies it's going to require in order to have recognition. One side did mention it, but they didn't quite follow the logic, and that is that the Supreme Court has already given us the premise for the reason this legislation is important.

In terms of what I heard from the member from Halton, he was talking an awful lot about sticking to the good old days and making sure things happen. If you'd look backwards, we are not stagnant. Even when we look in this place, there's nothing stagnant about democracy in that there is this ongoing evolution and this fluidity that take place in our democracy. What's interesting about it is that laws that were written in Legislatures starting back in Britain and coming into Canada basically said that women were property and women didn't have a vote. Those laws were thrown out because the people said, "It's time for us to start looking at that."

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So if we take a look at, "Let's just stay right still, and everything is perfect the way it is," let's hold on a minute and recognize that we have to start looking at the future. This particular piece of legislation: Although it was said to us by the Supreme Court that at the national level the number that constituted a party—50—was wrong, we needed to put in legislation that broadened that capacity for us to respect the smaller parties—the CCF is a perfect example—or the farming groups that put together the parties in which we now see evolutions. In my particular riding, Harry Nixon didn't start out as a Liberal but ended up being the Premier for a short time. He came from a party that actually started out as about three people around the kitchen table in somebody's front room. I think we've got to be careful of saying that the status quo is acceptable.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I've heard a lot of people say that the Supreme Court of Canada has already made the decision on this particular issue. The Supreme Court of Canada has made a decision with regard to our federal election system; yes, they made that decision. They have not made a decision on the provincial one. There is a significant difference between the federal and the provincial systems. In the federal system, third parties are severely constrained from entering into an election. They can't spend more than \$150,000 to let their views out. At the provincial level, a third party can enter into the election with any amount of money they want to encourage people to vote one way or the other. Third parties are not constrained to spend only \$150,000; they could spend \$150 million.

That is the genesis of the suit at the federal level. The animal rights group wanted to go into the federal election and say, "Vote NDP." They didn't want to become a political party; they wanted to spend money to tell people to vote for the NDP. The Supreme Court of Canada said, "If you constrain their activity, then the only other way out is to allow them to become a political party." At our level, we don't have to do that because the animal rights group has every right to raise as much money as they want, and they can say, "Vote Conservative," "Vote Liberal" or "Vote NDP."

This legislation is unnecessary in order to meet any charter challenge. I encourage the Attorney General to go through with the lawsuit which is pending before the courts, fight it out at that level, then come back and, if they find that a piece of legislation is necessary, do it then.

Ms. Horwath: It's my pleasure to make a few remarks on the speech by our friend the member from Halton. I have to say it was very interesting to listen to him talk about the bill that shall not be named and shall not be debated in this discussion this evening, as opposed to the bill that's here before us. I have to congratulate the Speaker on his diligence in reminding members that we're here to talk about this particular bill.

I'm interested in the member for Lanark—Carleton's remarks because, yes, it is my understanding that this bill that's before us was the provincial government's response to this Supreme Court issue. It's interesting to note that perhaps there needs to be some relevance to the provincial perspective before such a bill is necessary. It's like you're fixing a problem before a problem has even been identified for the provincial milieu. Things are not exactly the same. I think it's really important that that issue be brought forward. Perhaps the issue needs to be tested in the courts before we even get to the point of requiring legislation. I think that's a wise way of looking at the bill that's before us.

I have some comments to make to this bill very shortly and look forward to doing so. There are many implications that haven't yet come to the table. While the member from Halton has raised a number of concerns from his perspective, mine is a little bit different, although I would say that some of the issues are underlying the concerns that members have been bringing in regard to "Two members isn't enough for a party; it's enough for a date," which I thought was very funny. But there are some things that two members can do that might disrupt the process, and I think that's important to get on the record.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Halton, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Chudleigh: I appreciate the member for Beaches—East York, who has looked into this from a legal perspective. He made some comments referring to the Supreme Court, and I think that's something we should all look at and remember. The Supreme Court, after all—I agree that the Legislature and the House of Commons are supreme, but the comments of the Supreme Court certainly should not be ignored.

Member for Brant, thank you very much for your comments. You mentioned that two people may not be enough, and you talked about the good old days. I'm going to have to check Hansard to find out whether I mentioned the good old days. I don't think I did.

I talked about the necessity of making sure that the political process was available to all people, and in that context I referred to two people forming a party as not being realistic. According to the member for Hamilton East, I made the comment, frivolously perhaps, that two people is not a party; it's a date. But sometimes it's

putting those things into perspective that makes a difference in the political context.

The member for Lanark—Carleton, the dean of the House, when he talks about the electoral interference of the courts and the way in which the process is structured—the kind of experience we have in almost 30 years of experience in this House should not be ignored.

Interjection.

Mr. Chudleigh: It's not 30 years, Norm? You're not that old? But it's soon to be 30 years of experience in this House. That kind of experience is not to be ignored, and we shouldn't go blindly into the future ignoring that kind of advice. Two people is not a party; it's a date.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Horwath: It's my pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 62, which amends the requirements for elections in the province of Ontario—in a somewhat minor way, one would think, but I would submit that there are issues we need to consider if this bill is to go forward and become law in the province of Ontario.

You'll know that earlier this evening my friend from Beaches—East York spent some time talking about where this all came from, why we are even debating a bill of this nature in the Legislature this afternoon. Of course, many speakers tonight have talked about the Supreme Court of Canada decision, the ruling that says that there's no justification for forcing parties to meet any particular threshold, that the whole point is that if people are of a particular view or have an important contribution, idea or suggestion they would like to make within the context of the electoral system, they should be able to do that without restriction. This, of course, is a federal ruling based on the federal situation.

But in looking at what some of the members of the opposition were talking about in terms of the extent to which perhaps this was frivolous, in terms of suggesting that only fielding two candidates as a minimum is good enough—I think they were using words like, "It would be more like a date than a political party"—I wanted to bring to the attention of the House an incident that has actually occurred in Canada in another province that brings to light the fact that there are things that can take place, if this system is put into place, that are perhaps not things we necessarily thought of or necessarily expected or planned when putting this legislation into place. I'm going to review it with you, because I think it's quite interesting. It's the issue of the possibility, the potential for mischief being brought into the mix with this particular situation, because making it easier for parties to get recognized and to get status makes it easier perhaps for parties with very few elected candidates to have a significant impact on the electoral results at the end of the day after a general election, and this happened in British Columbia.

1750

There was an organization called Independent Native Voice, also known as Native Voice. It was a very short-lived party that in fact was in Manitoba. In this particular instance, this party was in place in Manitoba. It was created in 1995 and it ran three candidates in the 1995

provincial election. After the election had taken place, accusations began to surface that Native Voice was not a political party per se, but was being funded by a different political party, one of the major political parties, and that in fact the Progressive Conservative Party was the one that was behind establishing and getting candidates to run for the Native Voice party as a specific strategy to siphon off votes from the New Democratic Party.

The Independent Native Voice leader was a person named Nelson Contois, who contested the Swan River constituency. Other candidates were his daughter, Carey Contois, in Dauphin and Darryl Sutherland in Interlake.

What happened was, on April 22, 1995, the Winnipeg Free Press newspaper quoted Progressive Conservative organizer Allan Aitken as saying that he had assisted Sutherland and the Contois in setting up their campaigns. He said he only wanted to ensure that "everyone ha[d] an equal shot at running" and denied that his actions contravened provincial law at the time.

A former New Democratic Party member was quoted in the same article as speculating that Aitken's assistance was a plot to undermine NDP support in native communities. Two days later, Sutherland told the Interlake Spectator that he had accepted help from Progressive Conservative organizers early in his campaign, but later distanced himself from these figures. He added that his candidacy was in fact legitimate.

Independent Native Voice fared poorly as a party in that election and received a total of 518 votes spread amongst those three candidates. Provincially, the PCs under Gary Filmon were re-elected in their second consecutive majority government, and the NDP registered a complaint as a result with Elections Manitoba concerning the Native Voice candidates, but no charges were laid afterwards.

But following an extensive exposé that was done by the CBC's Curt Petrovich, an interview was undertaken with Sutherland, and reports ran that indicated that his candidacy on June 22, 1998, was in fact the result of work of the Progressive Conservative Party.

Accusations that were laid included accusations by Sutherland that the PCs were guilty of vote-rigging and inducement in the 1995 campaign. The resulting scandal became a political flashpoint in the province of Manitoba. A Winnipeg Free Press article from June 24 noted that Sutherland was receiving \$111 biweekly in welfare payments at the time of the election, yet he contributed almost \$5,000 to his own campaign war chest. On the same day, Sutherland named local Progressive Conservative organizer Cubby Barrett as the source of his funds.

Premier Filmon, at the time, attempted to kind of push all of this aside, ignore it and not deal with it, but eventually he called a public inquiry under Judge Alfred Monnin before the end of June in response to mounting evidence that improper behaviour had in fact occurred. The ruling ended up being that the local Progressive Conservative organizers were guilty of inducing at least one candidate, Sutherland, to contest the election. Senior party organizer Taras Sokolyk was personally implicated

when it was discovered that he had channelled party funds to Aitken during the campaign. In his summary, Monnin described the behaviour of the Conservative organizers as "unethical" and "morally reprehensible."

Recalling the testimony of the high-profile Tories who perpetrated the vote-rigging effort, the retired jurist wrote that "in all my years on the bench I never encountered as many liars in one proceeding as I did during this inquiry."

So the point of my bringing this issue into the debate today is that there is a potential for this kind of tomfoolery to take place. I think those of us who are looking at this bill and acknowledging that perhaps there may be a need for some changes also need to be sure that safeguards are put in place to reduce the likelihood of this kind of tomfoolery taking place. Ultimately—and I don't disagree with the member from Brantford, who spoke earlier this evening—any kind of change in terms of electoral reform needs to be moving us forward on a path of making sure that people have more opportunity for democratic process, more opportunity for open and transparent debate, more opportunity to review and view the ideas, the thoughts and the hopes that people in Ontario have. In some cases those are articulated and encapsulated in some of the major political parties, but in some cases they will be represented by smaller voices or by smaller groups of people. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. In fact, I think that's a very positive thing. However, we have to make sure that, as we contemplate these kinds of significant changes, we also ensure that we're putting in place a system—because we don't ever want to be in the same situation that Manitoba was in when they saw the kinds of activities that were taken on by their Progressive Conservative Party in a way to try to gerrymander and affect in a negative and dishonest way the outcome of the will of the voters.

That's certainly something that we would never want to see in the province. I'm sure nobody in this chamber, nobody in this Legislature, no elected official at the provincial level would like to see that happen here in Ontario. It would certainly be a bad thing in terms of a negative result that could come if we're not careful about how we move the yardsticks when it comes to a reform of the electoral system in the province of Ontario.

Notwithstanding the fact that the official opposition has more time today, particularly, talking about the bill that shall not be debated today, I believe that this bill needs to go through the appropriate process of committee review, because there are probably some compromises that can be made and some decisions that can be determined that are more appropriate and more sensitive to the kinds of issues that are being brought to light today.

I see it's that time, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: It is that time. It's ever so near 6 of the clock. This House is adjourned until 1:30 of the clock Monday, December 4.

The House adjourned at 1757.

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Second Session, 38th Parliament

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(Hansard)**

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Monday 4 December 2006

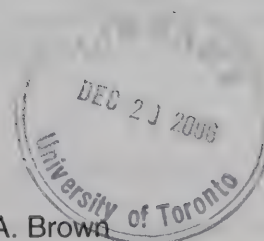
Lundi 4 décembre 2006

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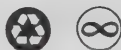
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 4 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 4 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): The time for a new public secondary school in south Nepean is now. We are the fastest-growing community in this province, with the highest birth rate in all of Canada. The people who live there come from all walks of life and from every corner of Canada. Many of our residents are new Canadians and we are so proud of that in the national capital.

Recently, thousands of new homes have been built there, something that people in other parts of Ottawa and Ontario may not know. Presently, parents who have children attending three south Nepean elementary schools—Berrigan, Farley Mowat and Adrienne Clarkson—must choose between sending their children on a school bus to another school zone or to another school board.

The new public high school would educate close to 1,200 students. That is why community leaders like former trustee Norm MacDonald and current trustees Alex Getty and Greg Laws are fighting for this school. So too have all the council co-chairs, led by Scott Towaij and assisted by Wendy Giles and Sylvia Zanetti Kamal.

Our local city councillors, parents and teachers are supportive, and all three community papers—the Barrhaven Independent and Derek Dunn, Nepean This Week and Malcolm MacMillan, and the EMC News and Erin Kelly—have delivered by promoting articles on this issue.

By next Thursday I will have delivered some 1,200 individual signatures on a community-driven petition in this Legislature calling on the province and the board to build this public school—one signature for each student who would attend this school.

The time to build is now, as I've said. Those 1,200 students deserve to be educated in the board of their choice within their own zone.

COLE GRUNDY

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to

congratulate Cole Grundy, a talented 16-year-old grade 11 student at Uxbridge Secondary School, whose winning logo design will be the face of the proposed youth centre in the township of Uxbridge.

In early October, the Uxbridge youth committee called on Uxbridge teenagers to design a logo for the centre. The logo will be used on all promotional and marketing material as well as signage for the centre. The youth committee has encouraged local youth to get involved in every aspect related to the centre, including the planning, fundraising and even the symbol for the centre, which will be recognized by locals for years to come.

With the guidance of an art teacher from Uxbridge Secondary School, high school students created their entries and had them submitted for the October 21 deadline. Cole Grundy was eager to begin his work on the logo independent of assistance, and was the first of 30-plus finalists to hand his entry in.

Cole's winning design was described as "professional and easily recognizable" by youth centre committee leaders. As well, it is said to reflect "the sense of unity and energy hoped for in a youth centre for Uxbridge."

When asked what inspired the design for his logo, Cole specifically mentioned the key element to his design, a house motif, signifying the shelter and safety that the youth centre will provide for local teens.

Cole chose to participate in the contest to build his portfolio for prospective colleges and universities in the future. He, along with fellow students and the rest of the community, are greatly anticipating the opening of the centre. Currently, efforts are being made to secure an appropriate location.

Cole is here with us in the House today, along with his parents, so we congratulate you once again, Cole, for your winning design. As well, I'd like to acknowledge the youth committee for their initiative and commitment in this endeavour for Uxbridge youth.

HIGHWAY 417

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Since my election to this House in October 2003, I have continued to bring to the attention of the Minister of Transportation the importance of prioritizing the four-laning of Highway 417 beyond Arnprior to Renfrew and beyond.

Finally, we're getting some response from the minister, to the degree that she has actually written a letter to the editor of the Pembroke Observer. She says, "I want to

assure residents and businesses that the Ontario government understands that expanding Highway 17 is important to residents in Renfrew county."

She is getting the point. However, these are just words written in the newspaper in Pembroke. We need some concrete action.

On Wednesday, I'm going to be meeting with ministry officials to discuss highway improvement plans in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. I have repeatedly raised this issue in question period. I have been presenting a petition for weeks now. We have made the point that the economic future of Renfrew county depends on the four-laning of this highway. When I talk to mayors and reeves in the county, they say that this project is the number one priority.

I think the minister should hear the words of Reta Adlam, who says, "Please don't just talk about it or make idle promises for the future.... We in this area, the largest county in the province, demand respect and we demand action now."

We demand it now. We want an answer on Wednesday that this will, in fact, be in next year's five-year plan.

BRAMPTON FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I'm happy to rise in the House and tell you about an amazing occurrence that happened in Brampton last month.

On November 12, fire station 207 got an unexpected visit. After 33 years on the job as a firefighter, Jake Haines thought he had seen it all. But that was before Haines and firefighters Greg Enright, Tom Debski and Rob McMaster were called into action to make a special delivery.

Julie Little, an expecting mother, was at the Georgetown Santa Claus parade with her family when she started having contractions. Andrew, Julie's husband, knew that he would not be able to drive her to the hospital in time, so he did the next best thing: He drove to the nearest fire station. When the firefighters at the station heard the doorbell ringing, they expected anything but this. Within six minutes, the firefighters had delivered a healthy baby weighing seven pounds and 15 ounces.

Firefighters today do much more than fight fires: They aid in bringing new life into this world. I'm glad to stand up here today and share with you this true story of the courage of these Brampton firefighters. What started out as a surprising, unexpected event turned into a test of courage that was inspired and welcomed by a new Bramptonian, a healthy and happy little boy.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Every week, people die in this province while waiting for an organ transplant. Yet the only commitment to increase organ donations

they've received from this government and this Minister of Health is the announcement on November 24 of a citizens' panel to hold public discussions on the matter. That announcement is yet another attempt by the McGuinty government to divert attention from its failure to act on what is the most inhumane waiting list in this province today.

1340

In fact, the implementation of a simple administrative measure, a declaration on drivers' licences as contained in private member's Bill 67—which was, I would remind the Minister of Health, unanimously endorsed by all parties in this Legislature seven months ago—could be saving lives today. It has the endorsement of the medical community and has received province-wide public support as well as that of Ontario's Trillium Gift of Life Network. This bill would make it mandatory for anyone applying for a driver's licence to make a declaration relating to organ donation at that time, while respecting the right of each individual to make that very personal decision. They can answer yes, no or remain undecided.

I welcome any step that can be taken to advance the cause of organ donation and I will, for that reason, be making a presentation to the panel myself on behalf of this important issue. But this government's refusal to deal with this issue is unconscionable.

CANADA-VIETNAM BUSINESS MISSION

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I would like to thank the Canada-Vietnam Friendship Association and its president, Mr. Trac Bang Do, for leading a business delegation to Vietnam for the purpose of signing a friendship agreement between Toronto and Ho Chi Minh City and to expand bilateral trade and investment between Ontario and Vietnam.

Last week, I was present when two significant events took place in Hanoi. First, Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization, and second, Vietnam, as the fastest-growing economy in South Asia, hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference, of which Canada too is a member.

As the red-hot economies of the Asian Pacific Rim propel them into the stratosphere, it becomes clear that we need a cohesive strategy which links us up with these hungry economic tigers; otherwise we will be caught in their claws or their takeoff turbulence and our manufacturing base will be left in tatters.

The McGuinty government had some significant successes, especially in the auto sector, but now we need to find ways, in co-operation with the federal government, to encourage private sector involvement.

In a message to the members of the Canada-Vietnam business mission, Premier McGuinty had it right when he said, "This business mission is an opportunity for Ontario companies to develop partnerships in Vietnam which will bring jobs to our province, expand economic development opportunities and create strong ties between our two jurisdictions."

Let's hope that Ottawa pays attention to the Premier's message.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): People who rely on the Ontario disability support plan have a tough time financially at the best of times, but the McGuinty government pushes them into further trouble by issuing ODSP cheques after the date that hydro utility bills are due.

I urge the McGuinty Liberals to work with local utilities to set up a systemic response, addressing the fact that ODSP cheques are not mailed early enough to meet hydro bill payment deadlines. Through no fault of their own, ODSP recipients may be late paying the amount they owe for hydro because their cheques simply don't arrive on time. Then they get defined as "high risk" and must post exorbitant security deposits and late payment charges, which of course they don't have the money to pay.

It should not be difficult for the McGuinty government, through the Ontario Energy Board, to recognize and do something about this very obvious problem. All it requires is better coordination and a government that cares. There are two public bodies involved: the utility and the provincial government. The McGuinty government, the higher order, should take the lead. Let's ensure that no disabled person in Ontario is penalized for a hydro payment that is late because of the government's unsynchronized cheque-issuing schedule.

I suggest that the McGuinty government turn up the heat on hydro utilities and have them develop a policy that when late payments are the result of ODSP cheques arriving after a set due date, those customers aren't put further behind by late payment charges and security deposits.

If the Premier and the Minister of Community and Social Services can't deliver a solution, then the McGuinty government is in fact creating more homelessness and hardship for people with disabilities who rely on them for help.

EVENTS IN STONEY CREEK

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I rise today to applaud the efforts of the emergency services in Hamilton who came to the rescue of my constituents in the Greenhill neighbourhood in my riding of Stoney Creek that was flooded during Friday's rainfall and storm.

The water rose so quickly—very quickly—that within an hour cars were being submerged and water was pouring through people's backyards and into their basements. The fire department, police and other emergency services and city personnel acted very quickly to ferry the stranded residents to safety and to help them secure their belongings.

I visited with some of the residents over the weekend as they continued to clean up after the mess that was left behind after the storm. It was a very scary situation for them. I commend them for supporting each other throughout this ordeal. This is the first time that this area has been hit this badly by flooding. I assured them that I would be working with their city councillor, Chad Collins, to ensure that everything possible is done to prevent a recurrence of this situation. I've also written a letter to the Premier and some of our ministers to make them aware of the situation.

Also, on a lighter note on the weekend, I'd like to just say thank you to all the volunteers and all the people who were involved in the two Santa Claus parades that were held in my riding, one in Stoney Creek and one in Grimsby. They were both fabulous, and tens of thousands of people came out to watch. I think anybody who has been involved in the parade knows how much work it is, how much coordination. It takes all year long. They were just spectacular events, so big congratulations to those volunteers as well.

ADVOCIS

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I rise with pleasure today and ask all members to welcome Advocis to Queen's Park, many of whom are joining us in the members' gallery.

Advocacy and professionalism drive the Advocis mandate. As the largest voluntary professional membership association of financial advisers in Canada with more than 5,500 members right here in Ontario, Advocis serves the financial interests of millions of Canadians. Advocis members are expert financial advisers who adhere to a professional code of conduct committed to putting their clients' interests first. Advocis promotes values such as integrity, objectivity, competence, fairness, confidentiality, professionalism, diligence and a promise to abide by all applicable legislation and regulation.

Advocis, as a self-regulating organization, has produced a third edition of its best practices manual. The standards that this manual lays out have been implemented across many practices and disciplines of the Canadian financial services industry. Best practices standards aim to increase the professionalism of financial planners, to the benefit of clients and advisers alike.

As the first certified financial planner elected to the Ontario Legislature and as a member of Advocis for over 20 years, I can tell you that the values of integrity, objectivity, fairness and professionalism I have practised as a member of Advocis have served me well.

Tonight, Advocis, myself and my colleagues the members from Oak Ridges and Beaches-East York are hosting a reception of all MPPs in the legislative dining room. On their behalf, I invite all members to attend and hear how Advocis can help their constituents and communities.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Mr. Racco from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly presents the committee's report as follows and moves its adoption.

Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 28, An Act to require the taking and analysing of blood samples to protect victims of crime, emergency service workers, good Samaritans and other persons and to make consequential amendments to the Health Care Consent Act, 1996 and the Health Protection and Promotion Act / Projet de loi 28, Loi exigeant le prélèvement et l'analyse d'échantillons de sang afin de protéger les victimes d'actes criminels, le personnel des services d'urgence, les bons samaritains et d'autres personnes et apportant des modifications corrélatives à la Loi de 1996 sur le consentement aux soins de santé et à la Loi sur la protection et la promotion de la santé.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PERIMETER INSTITUTE ACT, 2006

Mrs. Witmer moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr31, An Act respecting the Perimeter Institute.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Pursuant to standing order 84, this bill is referred to the standing committee on regulations and private bills.

CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE INNOVATION ACT, 2006

Mrs. Witmer moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr32, An Act respecting The Centre for International Governance Innovation.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Pursuant to standing order 84, this bill stands referred to the standing committee on regulations and private bills.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I

move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 to 9:30 p.m. on Monday, December 4, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1351 to 1356.

The Speaker: Mr. Caplan has moved government notice of motion number 250. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Kular, Kuldip	Ramal, Khalil
Arthurs, Wayne	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Balkissoon, Bas	Marsales, Judy	Sandals, Liz
Bartolucci, Rick	Martiniuk, Gerry	Smitherman, George
Bentley, Christopher	McMeekin, Ted	Sterling, Norman W.
Bryant, Michael	McNeely, Phil	Tory, John
Cansfield, Donna H.	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Caplan, David	Miller, Norm	Wilkinson, John
Colle, Mike	Milloy, John	Wilson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Mitchell, Carol	Witmer, Elizabeth
Elliott, Christine	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	Yakabuski, John
Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry	Zimmer, David
Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra	
Klees, Frank	Racco, Mario G.	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Kormos, Peter	Tabuns, Peter

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 43; the nays are 6.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg the indulgence of the House to take a few moments to comment on and perhaps add some clarity to events last Wednesday during question period.

The member for Leeds-Grenville rose on a point of order during question period respecting comments that were made by the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs. In doing so, the member requested that the Speaker review Hansard, presumably with a view to determining if anything said by the minister violated standing order 23, although not specifically what section.

Let me start by saying that my preoccupation in question period is and always has been to facilitate its progress with as few impediments as possible. In this regard, members will know that I have expressed some intolerance for points of order raised during the hour. Under our standing orders, the time taken for points of order is

included within the 60 minutes allotted for question period, Speakers having consistently encouraged members to, wherever possible, refrain from raising points of order until the completion of question period. This is usually possible unless a point of order raised relates to the process itself and needs to be corrected before we can proceed any further.

This was my motivation in suggesting to the member from Leeds–Grenville that points of order should be raised outside the time allocated for oral questions. It was not my intent to chide the member, but rather, in the face of what I perceived to be a general misunderstanding, to clarify for all members why I have exhibited intolerance with respect to points of order raised during question periods past.

Having said that, my mindfulness of the question period clock may have caused me to rush my response to the point of order raised by the member for Leeds–Grenville without sufficient contemplation and explanation. I would like to now take a minute to do so.

In the course of drafting a ruling, the Speaker may, from time to time, review Hansard in order to confirm his recollection of what was said. This was the process undertaken upon my ruling, for example, of June 21, 2006, to which the member made reference in an open letter to me last Wednesday. So the Speaker may, but does not as a matter of course, review Hansard in a ruling on the orderliness of language used.

This was borne out in several rulings in this House, but most specifically in a ruling by Speaker Warner, dated December 12, 1991, in which he said that “it is basically a question of order at the time when that language that is deemed unparliamentary is used; therefore, it is ... not useful to go back over a previous day’s proceedings and look to see whether ... a term was unparliamentary or parliamentary and that is because the possibility of disorder is then past.”

On the same subject, Speaker McLean had this to say on May 15, 1996: “The Speaker cannot be expected to review Hansard and reflect upon the words spoken. The words have to be heard in the particular context in which they were spoken to determine if they were unparliamentary or not.”

In this respect, our practice in Ontario does differ from the federal House of Commons, where the Speaker more frequently, although even there not in every case, reviews Hansard.

That being said, I’ve had some opportunity to reflect upon the specific words in question, and I have some concern with respect to the language used, whether or not it is in order.

I caution the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs that comments of that sort are unbecoming and make it difficult to maintain any level of decorum in this place. While I appreciate that the minister rose in the House last Thursday to offer an explanation, his remarks the previous day were not helpful in the circumstances.

I am disturbed by the increasing use of intemperate language. There’s frequently a stunning lack of regard for the traditional hallmarks of parliamentary discourse and,

specifically, respect for the Chair and the integrity of all members. To engage in such behaviour is to be destructive not just to the member or members targeted but to all of us and to this institution.

It seems to me that the role of the Speaker has slowly and increasingly become, if you will, that of referee of the first resort instead of referee of the last resort. This House frequently fails to regulate itself with maturity and temperance but rather pushes to and often beyond the limits of everyday civility. In that, we are not alone. Very recently, the House of Commons committee on procedure and House affairs felt compelled to undertake meetings dedicated specifically to the issue of decorum in the House. It is a problem for all of us.

While this place is neither a church nor a classroom demanding the level of decorum expected there, a parliamentary chamber nevertheless requires at least a minimum level of respect and regard for the work that we have all been elected to carry out and the manner in which we do that. The Speaker and members are partners in this endeavour.

For my part, I will endeavour to be vigilant as we go forward and to intervene when I perceive either the use of language or decorum not befitting this parliamentary institution.

I urge all members to recognize that you have a duty in the preservation of order as well.

Finally, to the member for Leeds–Grenville, I assure you that it was not my intent to be dismissive last Wednesday. Feeling aggrieved by remarks made by another member, you stood in your place and you brought them to my attention, as you should have.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

BOTTLE RECYCLING

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader):

It’s a pleasure to rise in the House today because in September, our government made what amounts to no less than an historic announcement, one that significantly strengthens our government’s capacity to protect our province’s cherished environment. I am pleased to report on an important step forward.

The province has signed a contract with Brewers Retail Inc. to be the service provider for Ontario’s deposit-return program for wine and spirits containers. In February, Ontario consumers will pay a deposit on all wine and spirit containers purchased in the province of Ontario at the LCBO, agency stores and winery and distillery retail outlets. They will be able to return the containers to the Beer Store for a refund. When the deposit-return program is up and running, Ontarians will be able to participate in a crucial venture: reducing the waste that goes to our municipal landfills.

The Beer Store runs one of the most successful return systems in the world, and it has the existing infrastructure and expertise to implement the new deposit-return program quickly and efficiently. It makes sense to build on the Beer Store's tremendously successful bottle return process. It makes sense to call upon the celebrated marketing expertise of the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. They, indeed, will lead a two-year public awareness campaign to encourage optimum participation in the deposit-return program.

We are very encouraged by the level of support that this initiative brings amongst our key stakeholders, and I'd like to read to you a couple of quotes. This one is from Jo-Anne St. Godard, executive director of the Recycling Council of Ontario:

"The Recycling Council of Ontario applauds Premier McGuinty for demonstrating leadership.... Deposit-return systems have proven their worth when it comes to maximizing the reuse and recycling of bottles.... The proposed deposit-return system is a good step towards extended producer responsibility in this province."

This one is from the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Mr. Doug Reycraft: "This is an important step for environmental protection in Ontario and good news for municipal governments. It builds on the Premier's commitment to an effective LCBO deposit-return system and will result in a more efficient blue box program in Ontario."

There is more. This one is from Jan Westcott, president and CEO of Spirits Canada. He says, "The McGuinty government is committed to preserving the environment for future generations, and the Ontario spirits industry fully endorses and supports these efforts."

We will continue to work with our partners—the Beer Store, the LCBO and all our stakeholders—to make serious advances in reducing what goes into our landfills. We will continue to count on Ontarians, people who are guided by goodwill toward their environment. This is nothing less than a win for our environment, a win for our municipalities and a win for all Ontarians.

SEAT BELTS

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'm pleased to rise today in the House with an important update on one of the most important pieces of legislation that's been passed by this Legislature this season. Our "one person, one seat belt" Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Seat Belts), 2006, has been proclaimed into law and will save lives in Ontario in the coming months and years. Every driver and passenger must wear a seat belt when travelling on Ontario roads, ending a dangerous practice that has gone on far too long.

It might surprise the members to know that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and injury for people aged three to 34 and that these deaths and injuries are preventable. We have a responsibility to make Ontario's roads as safe as possible.

In 1976, Ontario was the first jurisdiction in North America to make wearing seat belts mandatory. This leg-

islation will help ensure that this province continues to be a leader in road safety. Since seat belts were made mandatory, the number of people killed and injured in collisions has steadily dropped. For every 1% increase in seat belt usage, five lives are saved.

1410

I'm heartened by the most recent survey by Transport Canada that found that Ontario has the second-highest rate of seat belt use in urban areas in Canada at nearly 93%. That's above the national average of 91%. But we can and we must do more. This government will not rest until everyone who travels on Ontario's roads is as safe as they can be.

As this legislative session draws to a close, honourable members can be proud of the fact that they have helped make Ontario families safer this holiday season.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): In response to the transportation minister's statement today, the leader of the official opposition, John Tory, and the PC caucus supported the intent of Bill 148 and the principle of one seat belt per passenger, and we commend the government for taking that initiative. We are always willing to work with the Legislature to make Ontario's roads safer. Indeed, it was the PC government of Premier Bill Davis that introduced seat belt laws in this province some 30 years ago, and Ontario was the first jurisdiction in North America to have done so.

We are, however, disappointed that when we made an attempt to improve this legislation, the government chose to ignore the official opposition. During clause-by-clause hearings, we proposed to improve the bill by protecting owners of classic cars that are not currently equipped with seat belts, and also to eliminate the sweeping regulatory powers this bill bestows on the minister. That is a disturbing trend on the part of this government, and we believe it is not in the public interest.

To quote Oxford Community Police Service Constable Bob McDonald, "It's a shame to see it takes a tragedy to get the ball rolling." He was of course referring to the fatal accident in Caledon that occurred on Saturday, October 14, that finally brought the government to act on this important issue. That truly is a shame.

I want to take this opportunity to call on the Minister of Education. In the same way that they have taken the initiative with regard to seat belts, I am asking her to bring forward Bill 122, the seat belt legislation, which as she knows would in fact save many lives in this province by implementing those measures. By deferring on that initiative, many lives will be lost. I would ask you, Minister, to please bring that bill forward. We would respect you and support you for doing so.

BOTTLE RECYCLING

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal's further announcement with respect to the deposit-return system, returns to the Beer Store, which

has been granted the exclusive monopoly in Ontario for all deposits and returns. We look forward to more details from the minister. Certainly, we support initiatives to encourage recycling. The member knows that my colleague and leader, John Tory, had campaigned on the concept of deposit-return as a candidate for mayor of Toronto.

Members will recall that back in January 2005, the then Environment Minister Dombrowsky said that she was exploring a deposit-return system through the LCBO, and the government was proceeding down that path. We've seen Dalton McGuinty perform a flip-flop, I suspect on the spur of the moment, when quite frankly good work on the agencies committee by our members and the Environmental Commissioner put this issue onto the front burner.

The problem was that Dalton McGuinty suddenly announced that the Beer Store would have the exclusive right and then said to the minister, "Now go and negotiate." This is effectively like getting a barrel, putting the government prone over the barrel and saying, "Now go and negotiate." So when the spokesman talks about a \$15-million profit for the Beer Store system—it looks like they're getting a 10-cent return; we don't know if that's on top of or part of the \$15 million—we have to, as opposition members, watch closely to see what kind of sweetheart deal the government ended up giving to the Beer Store because of the awkward negotiating system the government found itself in.

I feel bad for the minister, because he was given his marching orders, I suspect without much consultation, and told to negotiate a deal once it had already been announced.

The minister knows that in other provinces there are private depot systems. There are options in other provinces to take them back to corner stores. The minister certainly knows as well that internationally there are reverse vending machines, where you put the bottles back in the vending machine and receive money in return. But instead of investigating any of these options, which are well-known in other provinces, states and countries, the Premier, for some reason, decided to have an exclusive monopoly contract with the Beer Store. We haven't heard either what the impact is going to be on the craft brewer industry, for example, nor the impact on consumers, many of whom would probably prefer another option to the Beer Store, like they enjoy in other provinces or states.

Certainly I think it would be important for the opposition to inspect the very cozy relationship between the McGuinty government and the big brewers. Hopefully they act in the best interests of taxpayers. But when you see the Premier making this type of announcement and forcing the government into a negotiating corner, you wonder if you have achieved the best results in the interests of the taxpayer or the interests of the environment. So I'll look to see how this is imposed. The sticker system, as originally announced, has been dropped by the Premier. There will no longer be stickers put on the bottles, I guess, as part of the minister's announcement today.

SEAT BELTS

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): I want to address first the comments made by the Minister of Transportation. I'm glad that all parties were able to work together to get this legislation through. But I note that there was a key amendment that was suggested by the Ontario Safety League to increase the effectiveness of the legislation and was put forward by us. The suggestion was that fines for not complying with the act be extended to drivers.

I'll quote Mr. Brian Patterson from the Ontario Safety League, who spoke to the bill in committee. "Although we see strength in this bill, we would propose the following amendments to ensure that the responsibility remains with the driver of the vehicle for those occupying the vehicle. We believe that there should be consequences for the driver, regardless of the age of the occupants, if he or she chooses to operate a vehicle with unrestrained passengers."

That amendment was supported by quite a few people who spoke before the committee. It had a lot of merit, and it's quite unfortunate that it was not passed, not adopted by the government. I see it as a missed opportunity.

BOTTLE RECYCLING

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): Speaking of lost opportunities takes me to the announcement by the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. In 2003, the government in power, the Liberal Party under Dalton McGuinty, promised 60% waste diversion in place within five years of being elected. They promised a ban on organic waste going to landfill. Frankly, if those two promises had been kept, we would have been opening a new chapter in environmental history here in Ontario. But they weren't carried through. In fact, they've been neglected, set aside. Those broken promises have substantial environmental consequences.

So we come to today's announcement. To call this an historic announcement leads one to the ugly sight of the word "historic" being tortured in public. This is not an historic announcement. When you look at the written documents that were given out about this announcement, there's a statement in the compendium that says that this is "part of an overall waste ... strategy."

If you have been in this House when a waste strategy has been presented, I would appreciate it if you would rise and address us, because to my knowledge there is no waste strategy. What we have is a series of ad hoc responses to a profound environmental problem.

That continues on in this sphere. We have a beer bottle return system in Ontario run by the Beer Store that's very effective. It's quite correct to say that it is noted around the world, because it results in the return of something like 96% of bottles, reuse of those bottles, to a significant environmental benefit in terms of avoided dumping in landfill and in terms of reducing greenhouse gases. It is a

very useful program. We didn't get this with this announcement. What we have is a pale copy of that program and, strangely enough, a pale copy that runs through the Beer Store rather than the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, which is owned and controlled by this provincial government. It's straightforward enough to meet with the management of that corporation, tell them the kind of program that's going to be implemented and have them carry it forward. They are people who are used to handling large volumes of products in glass.

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You don't have to go to the Beer Store to do this work. In fact, the LCBO, according to the PIR website, is about a \$3.6-billion-per-year enterprise, one of the largest buyers in the world. If any entity could change the market in North America to require the provision of wine and liquor in standardized bottles that could be refilled and reused, it is this entity. So instead of actually doing something historic, making an impact on greenhouse gas emissions, making an impact on waste diversion, what we get is the Beer Store made into a blue box for the LCBO.

When the government misses these very large, very important opportunities to protect the environment, to protect our pocketbooks in terms of what we spend on waste diversion, it fails profoundly.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): On a point of order, Speaker: I want to correct the record relating to my response to the Minister of Transportation earlier. In my response, I referred to Bill 122 as seat belt legislation. As she well knows, it's a street racing bill. I wanted to be sure that was corrected for the record.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

VISITORS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just wanted to welcome to our galleries members of the Financial Advisors Association of Canada. Welcome.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DISABLED PERSONS

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would ask for and I hope we do have unanimous consent for all parties to speak for up to five minutes regarding the international day for the disabled.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Caplan as asked for unanimous consent for all parties to speak for up to five minutes on the international day for the disabled. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Yesterday marked the United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons. The theme of this year's day is accessibility to information technology. The day is being referred to as "e-accessibility" day.

Here in Ontario, we too recognize how important accessible information and communications are for people with disabilities. Access to information and communications opens up opportunities for everyone. People with disabilities often find themselves at a distinct disadvantage when they are unable to access information, be it in print or electronic formats.

Last month, we began accepting applications for membership on a committee that will work to develop a new proposed provincial standard for accessible information and communications. This standards development committee will be the third committee that we have established under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act in the past year. The first two have been drafting proposed standards in the areas of customer service and transportation.

Comme vous le savez, la loi prévoit l'élaboration de normes provinciales d'accessibilité qui auront une influence sur tous les aspects de notre vie en Ontario. Ceci nous rapprochera de notre objectif de faire de l'Ontario une province véritablement accessible d'ici 2025.

Pour moi, cet engagement a aussi une résonance toute personnelle. Lorsque j'étais conseillère municipale à Ottawa, j'ai eu le privilège de siéger au comité consultatif sur l'accessibilité de la ville. En tant que membre de ce comité, j'ai eu à régler des questions d'accessibilité qui se posaient à un niveau local très humain. J'ai pris connaissance des obstacles que rencontraient chaque jour les personnes handicapées dans leur propre collectivité.

Le comité dont je faisais partie s'est penché sur toutes sortes de problèmes locaux : comment améliorer l'accessibilité des postes d'essence libre-service; comment assurer que les personnes handicapées puissent traverser les rues de façon sécuritaire; comment élargir les trottoirs, pour n'en citer que quelques-uns.

J'ai pu constater à maintes reprises qu'en apportant des petites améliorations dans le fonctionnement d'une collectivité, on contribuait à une meilleure qualité de vie pour les personnes handicapées. Ces petites améliorations peuvent ouvrir la voie à des emplois, à une éducation et à l'établissement de liens sociaux.

Voyant ce qu'il était possible de faire, j'ai eu envie d'en faire plus. J'ai eu envie de mettre à profit les leçons apprises dans ma ville et de les appliquer à toute la province.

I am pleased to say that the first minister's annual accessibility report under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act has been drafted and that, early in the new year, I intend to table it in this House.

The report will give a more comprehensive overview of the progress our government has made this year. It will provide details on how we are working to reach out to different sectors across the province through partnership

programs in order to engage the private sector as well as the public sector in the goal of improving accessibility.

To me, an accessible Ontario is one where everyone has the opportunity to meet their full potential. By working together—the government with the broader public sector, the business community and citizens of all abilities—we can become a stronger, more inclusive society. The legislation gives us the framework. Now it is up to all of us to make the real changes that we need to make.

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the official opposition to recognize December 3 as the International Day of Disabled Persons.

I will say at the outset that we are fortunate to live in a great province that has been a vanguard with respect to promoting protections for some of our most vulnerable citizens. Under former Progressive Conservative Premier John Robarts, Ontario became the first province to adopt a Human Rights Code, an act which has become virtually tantamount to constitutional legislation.

We have also seen passage in this province of other significant legislation advancing the rights of those with disabilities, such as the Ontario Disabilities Act and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Later today, Bill 107, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code, will be debated for third reading in this Legislature. Although I will not remark on its content at this time, I will say that, given the profound importance of the Human Rights Code to protect and defend the rights of vulnerable people, I would encourage all members of this House, as well as those at home, to watch the debate and carefully consider the remarks of the members who will be speaking.

This year's theme of the International Day of Disabled Persons, e-accessibility, was chosen to both recognize the opportunities rapidly expanding technologies afford to disabled persons and to urge legislators and others to ensure that these technologies are developed in conjunction with open and inclusive policies and practices.

It is without question that information technologies present huge opportunities to better the lives of those living with disabilities, but I would be remiss if I did not underscore the importance of access in this regard. Although there are strides being made to ensure that these technologies are indeed broadly accessible to vulnerable people, there remain substantial issues, such as an inability for adaptive programs to be developed at the rate that technologies become available.

An example of this problem is illustrated by the fact that, according to the United Nations' website, many websites remain inaccessible for the blind. A recent study of the Financial Times Stock Exchange top 100 companies in the United Kingdom showed that approximately 75% of company websites did not achieve basic levels of accessibility. This is an issue that is certainly troubling and requires our utmost vigilance as legislators.

I would like to take this opportunity to report that in my riding of Whitby–Ajax, substantial plans are under

way to build an international centre of excellence in the promotion and development of accessibility and inclusionary practices to be called the abilities centre. The abilities centre will be a world-class recreation, sports, and performing arts facility fully accessible to all persons with a varying degree of abilities and challenges. The abilities centre will represent a paradigm shift, with its focus on promoting abilities rather than seeing disabilities. This will lead to enhanced dignity for the children, youth and adults who will be stakeholders in a facility that welcomes and, indeed, hosts everyone. Social barriers will give way to inclusion because of the integral focus on developing abilities.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to rise today Speaker. I would ask all members to join me in recognizing the International Day of Disabled Persons.

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Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): Yesterday marked the United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons. Unfortunately for disabled persons in this province and in this country, poverty and disability too often go hand in hand. The disabled make up about one out of every eight people in this province—that is about 12%—but they also make up about one of every five people who is required to get food from a food bank. That is about 20%.

They are unemployed: Amongst the unemployed, disabled are amongst the highest group. When you register them against aboriginals or women or people of colour, the disabled are amongst the highest group of those who find too often that they are unemployed. The good times have come to Ontario, and come and gone, but they were always at the periphery.

On matters such as ODSP, Ontarians with disabilities have got pitiful increases in the last three years and none before that for a number of years: 3% in the first year of this government, zero in the second year, and 2%, which was held back until this month, a period of some eight months.

If you are disabled and if you have children, every month you see the clawback of the monies from the national child benefit taken away from you. The federal government gives the money and the provincial government takes it away.

But you know, it's very sad to see what all governments have done for disabled people. You see, the federal government has axed the court challenges program, taking some \$5 million out of the hands of the disabled that had allowed them to challenge programs and policies which were contrary to their best interests. The province, not to be outdone even for a moment, has axed the many deputants, the 150 or so, who wanted to come forward to talk about human rights under Bill 107. They took away their rights to make a statement of any kind. Those disabled and their representatives have found themselves again on the periphery.

The United Nations talked about e-accessibility. This is a very important concept to people around the world. I'd like to quote from the UN document, in which they

say, "At the First World Summit on the Information Society in 2003, governments expressed their commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge. Despite the vision, many persons with disabilities remain unable to take full advantage of the Internet as most websites are inaccessible to the blind and visually impaired, heavily dependent on using the mouse, and training is often conducted in inaccessible formats and venues. As persons with disabilities are amongst the most marginalized in society, many do not have access to information technologies at all. Even those with access to information technologies may not be able to utilize them effectively, as available adaptive equipment cannot keep pace with innovation."

We need to improve those websites. We need to make them accessible to the visually impaired, to the blind and to all people with disabilities. Equality will come to this province and to this country when there is equality in the workplace. Equality will come here when the disabled are able to obtain information that is necessary in this information society. Equality will come when wages and benefits are brought together so that the gap between Canadians with and without disabilities is erased.

Some 10 years ago, the Supreme Court of Canada had a landmark ruling in which they ruled that sign language had to be made available to those Canadians who were deaf so that they would have equal services in public institutions, in hospitals and in places where sign language was necessary for them to communicate.

I see my colleague and friend here in the Legislature sitting up there today, former member of provincial Parliament Gary Malkowski, the first deaf MPP elected to this province. But it is very sad that he is having to watch the debate with the teletype because there is no interpreter for him in this Legislature. It's very sad that even after 10 years and the Supreme Court ruling, we still haven't got our act together.

IAN SCOTT

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent for all parties to speak for up to five minutes regarding a former member.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Caplan has asked for unanimous consent for all parties to speak for up to five minutes regarding a former member. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): It is an honour for me to rise today and say a few words about Ian Scott, to pay tribute to Ian Scott.

I recall when I first met him, Speaker. It was the election of 1990—rather dark days for our party, you will recall. It was a challenging time, as I was knocking on doors, not getting a particularly warm response, and just

a short while before that I'd lost my own dad. So it was a difficult time. I was, to say the least, a little bit unsettled but putting on a brave face. I got word that our provincial Attorney General, one Ian Scott, was coming to campaign with me. Now, that was a huge psychological boost. As a lawyer, I had heard about this Ian Scott guy, who was an advocate. As far as I was concerned, as a young lawyer and in my circles, this guy walked on water. As an aspiring politician, I knew of his brilliant public policy initiatives. He was a very progressive thinker who seemed to be able to get things done. In short, I held him in awe. When I met him at my campaign office, he took a quick look at me and said, "So you're the kid. Let's go campaigning."

What most impressed me about Ian Scott during our 45 minutes at Billings Bridge shopping centre in Ottawa South in the late summer of 1990 was not his legal skills; it was not his stature and accomplishments as our Attorney General. What most impressed me was his warm and friendly and completely self-effacing approach to those he sought to serve. Sure, he had lots of steel and an unmatched ability to cut his opponents down to size, and he never, ever backed away from a fight, but above all, Ian wanted to serve others. That's what impressed me that day. The great majority of people we met that day didn't even know who he was, but that didn't matter to Ian. What mattered was that they knew they mattered. Ian taught me in short order that politics is not about you, the politician. It's not about your talents; it's not about your accomplishments. It's about the people you work for.

Ian Scott was one of this province's finest legal minds. As I said, as a lawyer, I held him in some real awe.

Il était l'un des leaders des plus progressifs et des plus motivés, et à un âge relativement jeune, son leadership m'est apparu comme un exemple à suivre. He was one of Ontario's most progressive and principled leaders, and he inspired me.

Last but not least, he was a true orator and one of this chamber's most eloquent voices. When he spoke, it was said it could be like silk off a spool. Shakespeare once said that action is eloquence. Ian took it a step further: He was eloquence in action.

Before entering politics, Ian made a name for himself as a constitutional lawyer, a man with an exceptional mind for detail, an ear for the nuance of language and a big place in his heart for the underdog, the downtrodden, the disadvantaged. As Attorney General, he took action to ensure that everyone got fair treatment under the law. He saw to it that people in the public sector were paid equally. He enshrined in Ontario's Human Rights Code the principle that no one can discriminate against another human being on the basis of sexual orientation. This was not a purely academic discussion for Ian. Ian himself demonstrated that while our sexual orientation is part of who we are, it has nothing to do with our God-given talents and skills and how we choose to use them. Ian would have us understand that he was never a talented gay man; he was a man with tremendous talents, and he chose to put those to the service of others—a man who

happened to be gay. And we honour Ian Scott by bringing this perspective to our work on behalf of all Ontarians, regardless of their sexual orientation.

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Ian took an activist approach to the law. He abolished appointments as Queen's Counsel, introduced freedom-of-information legislation and introduced an independent, arm's-length panel to appoint judges.

When he left public life, Ian returned to practising law and teaching and mentoring a new generation of civic-minded young people. Even after a stroke made it difficult for him to speak and get around, he still made his presence felt here in this Legislature by lending his support to a barrier-free Ontario for the disabled.

These are truly remarkable accomplishments, but Ian had something else, a quality that was even more impressive than his CV, a quality that led people on both sides of the House to admire him and earned him the enduring, enthusiastic respect of his peers: courage—the courage to stand up for what was right even when what was right wasn't popular, the courage to insist that in his work, his sexual orientation was just not relevant and the courage to fight back from illness to continue being a contributing and productive member of society.

Ceux et celles d'entre nous qui l'avons bien connu ressentent fortement le poids de sa disparition. Those of us who had the privilege of knowing him well miss Ian very much, and we understand how important Ian's family was to him. I know we all share his sister Martha's regret that she couldn't join us today, but we are honoured to have his brothers Brian and David and his sister Nancy with us here today, as well as his friends Genie Thomas and Neil McCormick.

Speaker, you should know that David Scott is to the Ottawa legal community as Ian Scott was to the Toronto legal community. I once raised this issue with Ian. I said, "Ian, why is it that you came to Toronto and your brother David stayed in Ottawa?" He said, "That's easy. Toronto had first pick."

I am pleased that family and friends are here today, and on behalf of all Ontarians we thank them for their support, their care and their love of our friend Ian Scott. You should know that your loss is Ontario's loss too.

Mais, monsieur le Président, je pense—non, je sais—que l'Ontario est une société meilleure, plus juste et plus forte parce que Ian Scott en a fait partie. Ontario is a better, more just and stronger society today because of Ian Scott: because of his eloquence, because of his action, and because of his courage. His career and his example are a reminder to all of us, each of us privileged to sit in this House as a representative of our people, that what binds us together, our shared calling to serve the people of Ontario, is greater than the parties that separate us, and that we are not here to serve some abstract ideology; we are here to serve our people with every gift and talent at our disposal: our hearts, our minds, our unfailing energies. It seems to me that was the benchmark set by one Ian Scott, and that is a standard to which each of us must strive.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I rise to join the Premier and Mr. Hampton in paying tribute to the late Ian Scott. On the day of his passing, I was quoted accurately as saying he was a wonderful and courageous and funny and smart and dedicated man. That may seem unusual coming from someone in another political party, but I really liked this man. I really admired this man, even if I disagreed with him on issues from time to time.

Much of that affection and admiration in my own case came from a long time before politics for both of us. As a young lawyer in 1980, I was junior to Bob Armstrong, now a justice on the Ontario Court of Appeal, and we prosecuted doctors in front of the discipline committee of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. The discipline committee consisted then, as I think it still does today, of doctors and lay people, not lawyers, and as a result there was no judge who could deal with legal issues that arose during the course of those hearings. That job was given to Ian Scott. What an experience—it really is similar to what the Premier had to say—for a first-year lawyer like me to watch him argue a point with legal counsel in front of that tribunal, but perhaps even more importantly, to watch him dispense advice and in effect rule on legal points. He was articulate, he was balanced and, even in those very difficult circumstances, often in those cases that were complex and difficult for all concerned, he was witty. He went out of his way to teach me, as a young lawyer who was there, a brand new lawyer, to explain things to me and quite frankly to kid me about my misguided political ways. I don't suppose I recognized until much later how lucky I was to have even had those brief exposures to Ian Scott as a teacher, as someone who taught me about the law.

In public office, he was a fighter for progressive change and played a role as such within his party, an important role which every political party needs, without exception, to push back against the inevitable influences of the status quo. His many public policy legacies are prominently on display still to this day in the statutes of this province and have passed the test of time very well indeed. As a parliamentarian—and I had the chance not just to watch him on television but I was here during some of the early years, helping Larry Grossman and others, when he was in Parliament here—he was, in my view, without peer in his generation. I watched some old question period tapes in preparing to come here for the first time, and it was wisely suggested by a number of people on all sides that I should watch as much Ian Scott as I could, both asking and answering questions.

I thought the very best of many good obituaries about Ian Scott was written by Jim Byers in the Star. It included what I thought was a very short but incredibly accurate description of Ian Scott in the Legislature, and I want to quote from it. He said, "In the Legislature, Scott was daily theatre, sometimes sighing slightly as he rose to answer questions, pitying his overmatched interlocutor, fingering his bifocals as a prop, habitually licking his lips in preparation for the oratorical kill." And you know what? As I thought about it, I remembered all of those

things: the licking of the lips, the fingering of the glasses and how he really did look like he was taking pity on someone he was about to do in. It was an entirely accurate, very short description of Ian Scott here in this Legislature.

What was perhaps talked about the most in the articles written about him was his courage. He was a courageous lawyer. And he was a courageous lawyer in many different places; for example, arguing personally Ontario's case on separate school funding in the Supreme Court of Canada. That was something he took a personal risk to do. He was, as I mentioned, a courageous legislator, and many evidences of that rest on the books of Ontario today. In his own way and in his own time, as the Premier mentioned, he was courageous in how he handled his personal life within the context of what is sometimes a bit too public a public life, as we all know.

But the greatest courage of all came following his stroke, when he once again led by example, never giving up, never showing any wavering from that classic determination that he had. I noticed that the twinkle never went out of his eye and that smile was never off his face when there was an occasion to smile, so that even if he couldn't speak the words, which was really one of his greatest gifts earlier on, he could convey a lot of messages with the few words that he did speak and with that smile and with that twinkle in his eye.

Dans sa vie professionnelle, en public et en privé, la façon dont il a relevé les défis de la vie, Ian Scott a été un exemple. In his professional life, in his public life and in his private life, in how he handled some of life's biggest challenges, Ian Scott was an example. Notwithstanding our partisan differences, we were friends. I'm very glad I had the chance to work with him. I'm only sorry I didn't get the chance to serve here with him within the context that the Premier mentioned today. I'm very happy to have had this chance to stand here today to thank his family and to thank him for a life too short but very well lived.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I am also pleased to be able to say a few words about the contribution of Ian Scott to this Legislature, to Ontario's legal system and to Ontario in general. I first met Ian Scott under what might be called by him some embarrassing circumstances. This was shortly after the 1985 election. At the time, the New Democrats and the Liberals had written an accord, and the accord called for a number of measures to be implemented in law in Ontario. Ian Scott had been sworn in as Attorney General, and he actually came to my part of the province to announce a new community legal clinic. I had been one of the people who had been part of the group that had been struggling to get the legal clinic established for some time. When the announcement was over, Ian Scott came over and shook my hand and wanted to know what I did. I said, "I'm a lawyer. I practise here." He said, "Well, we're looking for a candidate to run here in the next election." I wasn't sure what to say, so I didn't say anything, at which time he tried to interest me in running as the

Liberal candidate. After this had carried on for a few minutes, I said, "Well, sorry to inform you, Mr. Scott, but I'm running as the NDP candidate."

1450

I paid for that from 1987 to 1990 when I was the NDP critic of Ian Scott, because there were a number of measures that Mr. Scott had before the Legislature, and of course part of your job is to ask questions and, from time to time, to offer up a critique. So, as Mr. Tory has described, I got to experience the licking of the chops, the anticipation of the response that was designed to poke fun at the questioner. I must say, though, that I enjoyed every bit of that work, I enjoyed those three years because it was a very interesting time in terms of things that were introduced, debates that happened and things that were passed in the legislation.

I want to give credit to Ian Scott. He introduced Ontario's first freedom of information act as part of the NDP-Liberal accord. But if we think about it today, it's hard to imagine now how 20 years ago it was virtually impossible for members of the public to obtain even basic information about what their government was doing. Now we do freedom of information requests all the time, much to the embarrassment of the government.

He also introduced Ontario's first pay equity bill, again as part of the New Democrat and Liberal accord. It was a bold step towards equality in this province and it made a huge difference in the lives of thousands of working women. Again, it's hard to imagine today how groundbreaking this was at the time. With much pain, he overhauled Ontario's family law system, and part of what we debated here between 1987 and 1990 was, again, some of the changes that were not done easily and sometimes were done with much disagreement. And he amended Ontario's Human Rights Code to ensure that no citizen of Ontario could be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation.

One of the most interesting times for me, though, was immediately following the 1990 election. About three weeks after the election, I was in my office—no cabinet had been selected—and I was told that Ian Scott wanted to talk to me on the phone. So I answered the phone and we exchanged pleasantries and he said, "I want to talk to you about some issues at the Attorney General." I said, "Oh, okay." He said, "Where do you want to meet?" I said, "Well, I'll come over and meet you." So I went over to what was then going to be his MPP office, and first we talked about the election. I said, "When did you first think you were in trouble?" He said, "The very first day I went out and canvassed. I tried to talk to somebody about the Constitution and they slammed the door on me. I realized then that the public of Ontario was going one way on the Constitution and the Peterson government was going another way and we were in big trouble."

But the second thing he wanted to talk about was—he said, "I think you're going to be the next Attorney General, and I want to talk to you about some of the things that are going to fall on your plate. One of them is the Askov decision, which I expect the Supreme Court of

Canada will bring down about two or three weeks after you become Attorney General. I just want you to know that it was the Conservatives' gift to me and now it's my gift to you." Some gift it was. Literally, we had about 15,000 criminal charges that were in danger of being thrown out of our courts virtually overnight. But he was very gracious about it and said, "Look, we have been underfunding our court system for many, many years. I was not able to get all the financial support from my government. Now it's a crisis, and this will have to happen."

He was also very gracious about explaining to me where some of the other land mines lay in the ministry of the Attorney General and what he thought had to be done. I thanked him for that. I didn't thank him after that when he became my critic as the Liberal spokesperson on Attorney General issues.

We have, indeed, lost someone who made a huge contribution to Ontario. As much as Ian Scott loved the debate and took no prisoners in the debate, at the end of the day for him it was very much about doing the right thing for the people of Ontario. If we reflect on his record and reflect on all that he did here and before coming here, and the tremendous struggle that he put into life after leaving here, we would all agree we have lost a great Ontarian and somebody who is worthy of all of our respect.

The Speaker: I will see that the Hansard of today is forwarded on to the family.

VISITORS

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I know this is not a point of order, but I'd very much appreciate having the opportunity to introduce Nana and Ben Curtis from the wonderful riding of Scarborough East. Their son Andrew is serving us well as a page in this session of the Legislature.

ORAL QUESTIONS

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. Earlier today I sent the Premier a letter advising him that I would be asking some questions today about the issue that arose in the House last Thursday with respect to reports of gross mismanagement of money within children's aid societies.

The Minister of Children and Youth Services refused to answer questions that were asked of her at that time, stating that she could not comment on the auditor's report before it was released. Without in any way asking for comments on the findings of the Auditor General, which of course we'll all see tomorrow, will the Premier please tell us on what specific date his government first had any information of any kind from any source which sug-

gested questionable spending of taxpayers' money by children's aid societies on things such as expensive cars, trips and gym memberships? What was the specific date on which his government first had information with respect to this kind of questionable spending?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I, again, appreciate the advance notice of the leader of the official opposition's interest in this issue. I do not doubt for a moment his sincerity in obtaining some of the details in which he is so greatly interested. But I say this: Out of respect for both this Legislature and the Auditor General, what I can say is that after we received information from the Auditor General—we received a draft report—I can tell you that the minister quickly began to get to work on this. She has met with representatives of the children's aid societies, and she has an announcement to make in this House tomorrow. We think that's the appropriate place for her to make that announcement. We think we owe the Auditor General the courtesy of allowing him to present his formal report first thing tomorrow. We think that is the appropriate way in which we should proceed in the circumstances.

Mr. Tory: We all want to, probably no people more so than the opposition, give the Auditor General the courtesy of presenting his report. But in your answer just now—in the Premier's answer, Mr. Speaker—you implied that there was some date in the past before last Thursday, which is the day the media reports arose on this matter, on which the government knew about allegations of misspending on the part of children's aid societies across the province, taxpayers' money that was meant to go to vulnerable children and families and in fact went to buy expensive cars, gym memberships and trips to the Caribbean.

We know that the minister received quarterly reports from the children's aid societies. We know, because the Premier just made allusion to it, that there was a draft report from the Auditor General. All we're after, and it is not discourteous to the Legislature or to the Auditor General, is to know from you—and you seem to have some idea of the date, I say to the Premier—what was the date on which your government first knew of the information with respect to allegations of misspending? What was that date? We want to know that, and I think we're entitled to know it. I would hope the Premier could answer that question.

1500

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The case that the leader of the official opposition here, of course, is trying to build is that somehow we were negligent or irresponsible in failing to act on information when we first received it, and I understand why it would be in his interest to try to put forward that case.

Without getting into the details of the announcement for tomorrow, I would ask Ontarians to look at what we've done as a government. We have created the first-ever Ministry of Children and Youth Services. We have passed legislation allowing, for the first time, the Auditor

General to look at the books of the children's aid societies. In 1994, 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2002, the Auditor General looked at the child welfare program and protection services but he couldn't get access to the children's aid societies. We have changed that so that he has access to those particular files. The minister has also recently introduced independent child advocate legislation so that never again will Ontario's child advocates be muzzled by the government of the day.

I think our actions clearly demonstrate our commitment to Ontario's children, particularly those who are vulnerable and who are under the responsibility of the children's aid societies.

Mr. Tory: What we're seeking here is a date. I don't know how the Auditor General's report coming out tomorrow and an announcement the minister is going to make tomorrow, or any of the other things you've talked about, many of which went on in the past, have anything to do with the Premier's giving a specific answer to a very specific question that I had the courtesy to supply to him in advance.

You're talking all around the fact—the Premier is, Mr. Speaker—that there is a date you could name on which people in your government knew of these allegations of misspending. It's not about who set up a ministry and it's not about who allowed the Auditor General in to look at these books; it is about the day on which you were informed of allegations of misspending of taxpayers' money meant for vulnerable children. All I'm asking you to do is to have the courtesy—when we talk about courtesy—to tell this Legislature: What was that date? When did your government know about these allegations, and ideally from whom? But let's just start with the date: When did you know, and why won't you tell us?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition is focused on a particular date. We're focused on getting results for Ontario's children. That's the difference.

There are five important things that I would speak to in terms of demonstrating our resolve to support and lend assistance to Ontario's vulnerable kids. Again, we've created the first-ever Ministry of Children and Youth Services. We've passed through legislation allowing the Auditor General to look at the books of the children's aid societies. We've passed Bill 210, legislation to create an independent appeals process for children's aid society complaints to the Child and Family Services Review Board. Fourthly, we've introduced independent child advocate legislation, and we hope we get the support of the opposition parties in that regard. And finally, tomorrow in this House, the Minister of Children and Youth Services will make an announcement fully responding to the concerns raised by my friend today and, more importantly, the concerns raised by the Auditor General.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Tory: My question is to the Premier, on the same subject.

I would point out to him that the first minister responsible for children in Ontario was Margaret Marland, appointed by a Progressive Conservative government.

I would make the case that, in refusing to name a date, what you're really calling into question is whether you're serious about doing all of these things for real that you talked about, because this speaks to the question of money being misspent that was meant for the vulnerable children. It's being misspent, and you won't even answer with the date on which you first found out it was being misspent or if there were any allegations brought to your attention.

I gave you advance notice of a second question, and you have suggested that there was some date which you won't share with us for reasons best known to you. Let's try the second question, which is: On that date, which you won't share with us, what specifically was done by your government, by the minister, by you or your office? At that time, what specific steps were taken? What meetings were convened? What instructions were given to stop this kind of misspending on cars, trips and gym memberships of money that was meant for the children of Ontario?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: A few things: First of all, I beg to differ in terms of the categorization of Margaret Marland's responsibilities. That was a secretariat. There was no line item in the budget devoted to that, no staff, no real effort made to address that issue. I think it's important to keep that in mind.

Secondly, I think it's appropriate that we allow the Auditor General to present his report in the first instance. What I can tell the leader of the official opposition is that, upon receiving the information, the Minister of Children and Youth Services began immediately to put together a plan. She met with representatives of the children's aid society. She's going to make that plan public tomorrow.

I think we owe that, as a modicum of courtesy to the Auditor General, to allow him to present his report and for us to formally respond to that report once he has done so.

Mr. Tory: I find it fascinating that you can get up and respond directly to the comment about Margaret Marland but you can't answer a direct question which I provided you with advance notice on, and now a second direct question. And I want to repeat it. It's fine for you to say that somebody's coming here tomorrow to say something about all this. You have now suggested, first of all, that there was a date on which your government knew about these allegations of misspending. All I'm trying to get at now is: If you could give us the date, that would be great. But secondly, what we want to know is: On that date, whenever it was—and especially if it was a long time ago, but whenever it was—was there action taken at that time, not an action plan that's been cobbled together because of a bad day in the House last week or because the Auditor General or a media outlet got on to you about it? When the government first knew about cars and trips and gym memberships being purchased with money that

was meant for kids, what did you do about it at that time on that day to say no to that kind of misspending of taxpayers' money? That is the question. That is a question that families out there want to know about. It's a question—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I disagree entirely with the leader of the official opposition. I don't think families want to know anything about the internal process and the machinations of government; I think they want to know specifically what we're going to do in response to the information which we made available by changing the law in Ontario so that the Auditor General, for the very first time, has access to the children's aid society books. The only reason that he's able to come up with this information and to present these facts is because we invited him to do so. He was never permitted to do so in the past under the Conservative or NDP governments. We've changed the law in Ontario so that the Auditor General has access to that information.

We want to put in place a higher standard. Tomorrow we'll be announcing what we're going to do in terms of putting in place that higher standard. We deplore the kinds of events that were brought to the light of day because of the Auditor General's new authority, and we'll be acting on that directly tomorrow.

Mr. Tory: We'll all look forward to that, but at the end of the day it still leaves the question as to why you won't share with us—this could have been going on for months; it could have been going on for years. It may well be that the government first learned of this long before the Auditor General had the power to look into this. That's the part that you won't tell us. The Minister of Children and Youth Services said last week that we should all relax about this. She said she had nothing to hide. If that's so, why are you hiding the date on which you had this information made available to you for the first time, and why won't you tell us, as of that date—not tomorrow. It's fine to bring in an action plan after the Auditor General reports. What we want to know is, when did you first know about this? And by the way, I think people out there are very interested in knowing if, for months and months and months, their money was being spent on cars and trips and gym memberships. They're very interested in knowing: When did you know, and at that time, what did you do to put a stop to it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think that one of the things Ontario families want to know is, where was the indignation, where was the expressed concern, in 1994, 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2002 when the Auditor General looked at the child welfare programs in Ontario and their protection services but he couldn't get access to the children's aid society files? He couldn't because they wouldn't let him get access to that information. We've changed the law in Ontario. We've invited the Auditor General to come in. We said, "Please tell us exactly what has been going on there for years and years and years. Bring that information to the light of day. Bring that to us so that we can make that public. Let us develop a plan, let us act on

that." That is exactly what has happened, and that's what's going to happen tomorrow in this House.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Premier, last week the people of Ontario learned that more than \$1 billion of children's aid funding is being spent with little oversight by the McGuinty government, and that some of that money was being spent on luxury cars and on exotic trips instead of helping Ontario's most vulnerable children.

My question is about one of the children who fell through the cracks. Jeffrey Baldwin died because the children's aid society failed to check the criminal records of his grandparents, who were convicted child abusers. My question is this: Has the McGuinty government done anything to follow up on that tragedy? What have you done to ensure that all foster parents in Ontario have a criminal records check conducted on them before they receive children in their care?

1510

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): First I'd like to suggest that this is a case that is currently in the appeals process. The leader of the third party would probably know that the coroner has also expressed an interest in conducting an investigation here. It is very important that we allow that process to go forward.

In terms of the types of things that we are doing to protect children, the Premier has mentioned several. One that I will add, which is one that we added in February of this year, was the deployment and implementation of new regulations that are intended specifically in cases of kinship care, where societies are required to do background checks on every single adult in a prospective home, regardless of where that adult has lived currently or in the past.

Mr. Hampton: One day the minister says she doesn't want to comment on the auditor's report, and then she says she doesn't want to comment on criminal record checks. I'm not asking you about Jeffrey Baldwin; I'm asking you, are we seeing criminal record checks now in the aftermath of that unfortunate event? We know that in fact you're not conducting criminal record checks in all cases. We know that. We know that placement decisions have gone undocumented, that agreements between foster parents and children's aid societies were lost or unsigned, that visits by children's aid society resource workers never happened when they should have, and that some foster parents didn't receive necessary training. This is still going on under the McGuinty government.

My question is to the Premier. After the tragic death of Jeffrey Baldwin, why didn't the McGuinty government take action to make sure that proper procedures for recruiting, approving, training and monitoring foster parents were followed up and documented?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Again, I cannot comment on anything related to the case that the leader of the third

party is referring to. If I could comment, I would correct some of what he just said, but I cannot comment on that case.

I can also tell you that there was no common information system for children's aid societies whereby they could do this kind of work in the past. This is something that we inherited and are working really hard to address: a single information system that will allow individual children's aid societies to inquire on cases in other children's aid societies with specific time frames.

In addition to that, Bill 210, which the Premier made reference to, includes a new, independent, neutral third-party complaints process whereby a wide range of complaints can be brought forward—

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: Again, I'm not asking about Jeffrey Baldwin; I'm asking about what the McGuinty government has done as a follow-up from that unfortunate incident. Jeffrey Baldwin died a few years ago. You've had a lot of time to get the proper procedures in place. But we know that there has been a lack of oversight, and this has resulted in kids waiting too long for help from children's aid societies, in some cases with more tragic consequences.

One child, whose aunt and school principal called the children's aid society, waited 19 days to see a case-worker. Meanwhile, that child was physically beaten again and again. Another child waited five months, and a third child had moved out of the jurisdiction by the time front-line CAS workers got to the child.

Premier, don't you agree that children's aid societies should investigate, assess and document all referrals promptly?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Even though the leader of the third party suggests he's not asking about a specific case, he continues to cite examples of or make references to that case. He will not—he will not—have me fall for that.

I want you to know that every single tragic event is indeed more than tragic. We are firmly committed to the idea that a child in need of protection is supposed to be better off because the child protection system in this province has been involved in their life. Every single one of those situations is tragic. Having said that, although I believe child protection service workers—I also want to recognize that this is a very, very difficult line of work. I kind of suggest that they do God's work, but I know they're not well loved. But the almost 300,000 kids who are served by our children's aid societies every year appreciate that—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

Mr. Hampton: Again to the Premier: Your government has had several warnings about problems and challenges at children's aid societies. The unfortunate death of Jeffrey Baldwin was just one of too many.

Then we have heard from the Ombudsman, who for over a year now has come before your government and said, "There are serious problems here. I want to have independent investigative oversight authority of children's aid societies so we can get to the bottom of some of the problems."

Your government has had several warnings from people who have credibility. What I'm seeing here today, and what we saw last Thursday, is the McGuinty government trying to hide behind reports. I want to know, why hasn't the McGuinty government already taken action to protect these vulnerable children? Why have you allowed needed government funding to be used in ways that haven't protected vulnerable children?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP said that we're making efforts to hide behind reports, I gather to hide information or hide activities of some kind or another. The fact is that we brought more transparency than any government ever before to child protection services in Ontario.

Again, the first thing we did was establish a Ministry of Children and Youth Services. We passed a new law allowing the Auditor General to get access to children's aid societies' books—the first time ever. We've passed legislation to create an independent appeals process for children's aid society complaints to the Child and Family Services Review Board. We have introduced just recently independent child advocate legislation. Never again will Ontario's child advocate be muzzled by the government of the day. Tomorrow, the minister responsible for children and youth services will be disclosing yet more steps in our plan to strengthen child protection services in the province of Ontario.

Obviously, I strongly disagree with the leader of the NDP's perspective that somehow we are hiding things from Ontarians.

Mr. Hampton: Let me ask the Premier this question, then. The Ombudsman, who has excellent credibility in terms of doing the investigative work, who has a staff of people who have the expertise, has been asking your government not once but repeatedly over the last year for the authority to conduct investigative oversight of children's aid societies. Your government has voted against motions to do that. You have denied the need for that when we've asked here in the Legislature. Yet there has been warning after warning that there are some serious problems at children's aid societies and that children are being put at risk, and unfortunately some children are dying.

You claim that you've taken action. Can you tell us why you've denied the Ombudsman the authority to do this kind of investigative work when some of these issues could have been headed off over the last year?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP is apparently unsatisfied with the fact that we've created Ontario's first-ever Ministry of Children and Youth Services, something he himself would not do when they were in government. He said he's not satisfied with the fact that we've allowed the Auditor General to look at the books of children's aid societies, something that he himself would not do in government. He said he's not happy with the fact that we've introduced legislation that will create an independent child advocate, something that he himself would not do in government.

I wonder how many legislative officers—something tells me that if we put in the Ombudsman, he would say

that still was not enough. He'd dream up some other individual.

1520

We think we're on the right path. We think we've brought unprecedented levels of transparency. We think we've taken unprecedented steps to improve the quality of protection that we're providing for Ontario children. Tomorrow in this House, the Minister of Children and Youth Services will be disclosing still more steps in our ongoing plan to protect children in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Hampton: You may think it's a brilliant political strategy to try to blame an event which may or may not have happened 15 years ago for the fact that children are still at risk today, but let me tell you, Premier, to people out there who see children at risk, children's aid society front-line workers who see children at risk and don't see the resources necessary to address that, they take no comfort in your answer.

The reality is that in your fourth year of government you've had several warnings from several different agencies, from the courts, from the Ombudsman of Ontario, saying that there are very serious problems with a number of children's aid societies across the province. Here we are in your fourth year of government, and you have still not taken effective action.

When is the McGuinty government going to stop hiding behind reports and start taking the action that's necessary; for example, give the Ombudsman the authority he has requested to do the independent investigative and oversight work that our children's aid societies so obviously need?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: We're not going to do that. We have a different approach. We think it's intelligent and we think it's responsible. We have created a Ministry of Children and Youth Services. We've passed new legislation allowing the Auditor General to conduct these kinds of investigations. We've introduced yet still more legislation, a new bill just recently that will create an independent child advocate.

The leader of the NDP raised the notion that somehow there may be an issue of resources connected with the children's aid societies. That's not my sense of what little information we have received from the Auditor General so far.

I do want to remind the leader of the NDP that, in government, they cut children's aid society funding. I just want to make sure Ontarians understand where this government and this particular minister are coming from when it comes to supporting quality improvements in the services we provide to Ontario children in need.

Again, tomorrow in this House the Minister of Children and Youth Services will be making an important announcement about more steps we'll be taking in response to the Auditor General's report.

BOTTLE RECYCLING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): This question is for the Premier. It's been nearly three months

since the government hastily brought out a bottle-return program, announced on a Sunday in September when the Premier was taking his beer bottles back. At the time, we raised concerns here in this House about the fact that the details weren't thought out, another example of the willingness of the McGuinty Liberals to say anything on a topic.

Specifically, I asked the Premier about the 237 million wine and spirit bottles that would be sold between the date of the announcement and the effective date for the program which had been announced, and I asked him what he was going to do if people started saving their bottles for return in February. He said, "... he should not begin to save up his bottles," referring to me. "What I can say is that bottles that will be covered by this new return policy will be specially marked. They will be specially identified."

Now we read in the *Globe and Mail* this past weekend that there is no such plan to mark these bottles, so my question is this: What plan is in place to cover the tens of millions of dollars in uncollected deposits that people will be expecting back when they go into the Beer Stores after February 1? What is the cost to the taxpayers of this oversight, of your not having any plan or any answer as to what you're going to do about this?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I thank the member for the question, because this is an historic moment of leadership in this province, to finally introduce a deposit-return system, something that both previous governments refused to do.

In an earlier response to the statement, the member opposite asked, how are the craft brewers going to feel about this particular contract? I'd like to read a quote from John Hay, president of the Ontario Craft Brewers: "The Ontario Craft Brewers are impressed with the level of transparency and accountability built into the government's contract with the Beer Store. It sets a great precedent. The government has worked very hard to negotiate a fair contract with its service supplier—a contract that supports our shared commitment to supporting environmental protection in Ontario."

So in answer to the member's question, there are the appropriate transparency and accountability provisions as evidenced by support from John Hay of the Ontario Craft Brewers. If the public wishes to see it, of course the contract is—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Tory: Only the McGuinty Liberals could turn a historic moment of leadership into a historic moment of incompetence. It's going to be incompetence. That is because they think the taxpayers' money is just monopoly money; it's just play money and doesn't really matter.

The *Globe and Mail* said on the weekend: "Indeed, there is nothing in the plan to stop them.... The govern-

ment abandoned plans to institute a sticker system that would identify only those bottles purchased after Feb. 5 as too costly.

"It is now considering passing a regulation that would prohibit returns of bottles purchased before Feb. 5 but a spokeswoman acknowledged it would be difficult to enforce."

This could cost the taxpayers tens of millions of dollars due to people hoarding bottles. Indeed, the Brewers Retail is about to go out and advertise, saying to people, "Collect up your bottles and save them up and take them in." These are bottles on which people have paid no deposit, but they'll be able to collect one back. It's taxpayers' money. How could you possibly enter into a scheme where you have no answer as to what is going to happen with these tens and tens of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money that could be paid out to people who bring in bottles on which they have paid no deposit? How could you be that incompetent?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: It gets better because, in fact, Doug Reycraft of the Association of Municipalities says that the LCBO deposit return makes good environmental and economical sense for Ontario's municipalities. The only one who seems opposed to a deposit-return system is the member opposite. One day he was in favour, now he's opposed.

But it gets better: Former Conservative member, now Niagara regional chair, Peter Partington: "Ontario municipalities have been asking the province for decades to implement a deposit-return program on beverage containers. This announcement is welcome news and will assist us in meeting our waste diversion goal."

Municipalities, alcohol beverage stakeholders and environmentalists know the leadership that Premier McGuinty has shown and know the lack of leadership that exists on that side of the House.

HIGH-SPEED TRAIN ROUTE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Weston is a vibrant community in the city of Toronto, but today the community of Weston is at risk. The McGuinty government is about to rubber-stamp the terms of reference for an environmental assessment process that could result in the community of Weston being cut in two by a private high-speed train route.

Premier, Weston residents were promised a full and meaningful environmental assessment of the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of alternative routes. Before any environmental assessment can go forward, your government has to set the terms of reference. My question: Will the McGuinty government listen to the Weston residents and reject the narrow terms of reference that are before your government today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I thank the member for the question. The

province is committed to hearing from all sides with regard to this particular issue. In fact, I've met with the Weston folks myself. The terms of reference will be for a full environmental assessment. I believe that there are a significant number of alternatives that will be addressed in a full environmental assessment and that there are options that are available that are out there and which will come to light in terms of a full environmental assessment. So we are committed to hearing from a wide range and a full variety of folks on an environmental assessment that will look at all forms of options and alternatives in terms of looking at a broader transit strategy.

Mr. Hampton: I still didn't hear an answer to my question. What we know now is that the terms of reference before the McGuinty government are rather narrow. The people of Weston do not want to see their main street chopped in half and shut down. They don't want to see 144 trains blasting through their community at 75 kilometres an hour every day. The Environmental Assessment Act requires a thorough examination of alternatives, yet the terms of reference before the McGuinty government now barely look at alternative routes.

1530

My question is very specific. Are you going to ensure that the narrow terms of reference that are before you now are rejected? Are you going to ensure that there is meaningful consideration of alternative routes from a socio-economic perspective and an environmental perspective? Yes or no?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: The member simply doesn't understand the word "full." "Full" means that it looks at the entire impact on the community. Also, obviously the member hasn't been listening throughout the last few months when we've speaking about the whole concept of sustainable transportation, where we're now talking about inter-modal transportation, about broader strategies of transportation, that we're not looking at just one specific but at a broad context with respect to how we deal with transportation in this province, which includes public transportation, rail transportation, marine transportation and land transportation. So when we say "a full environmental assessment," of course it includes everything. Again, I just say to the member, what part of "full" does he not understand?

IMMIGRANT SERVICES

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Our diversity is one of our most valuable assets. It's an asset that previous governments had virtually ignored. The McGuinty government has demonstrated that newcomers are essential to Ontario's future growth.

Ontario received more than 50% of newcomers to Canada, and over 60% of adult newcomers to Ontario have at least some post-secondary education. Each year, 18% of working immigrants who enter Ontario hope to find work in a regulated profession or trade.

Peel region welcomed 74,000 of these immigrants in the period of 2003-05. Many of these newcomers chose

to settle in my riding of Mississauga East. The McGuinty government has invested a total of over \$320,000 in Mississauga East agencies, such as the Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre and the Maximilian Kolbe Foundation, to assist these newcomers in the area of integration.

Minister, my question is, can you explain how the new ESL and FSL initiatives are so important to the success of our newcomers?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I thank the member from Mississauga East for the question. The major change is that the non-credit ESL for adults has been brought over to my ministry. That's \$53 million a year that is now totally focused on helping newcomers achieve language success. We are doing a complete curriculum overhaul. We are now focusing ESL on occupation-specific English and also on an enhanced level of English, because we've been told by people in Peel and by people all over Ontario that one of the major barriers is this language barrier. With this new investment and enhancement of the curriculum, we are going to break down those language barriers.

Mr. Fonseca: Along with those investments that you listed, this year you introduced Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act. I understand that it's gone through second reading this fall and is currently going through committee process. The proposed legislation includes a new access centre for internationally trained individuals, the first of its kind, and is designed to help newcomers navigate through the registration system.

Minister, for those in my riding of Mississauga East who are internationally trained, being able to access this information readily is important when seeking opportunity to practise in their profession or trade. Could you tell us what this proposed access centre will do to break down those barriers?

Hon. Mr. Colle: This centre—an access, research and resource centre for the internationally trained—would be a mentorship centre, providing mentorship networks and also internship networks all across the province, while at the same time helping newcomers through professional staff within the government giving support to people trying to access this complex system of professional accreditation. The resources will be there, the proper counselling and supports will be there, and also the promotion of internships, mentorships, and the linking of foreign-trained professionals with our 80 partners across the province that help newcomers. So the access centre is a critical component of Bill 124.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I want to ask the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities about apprenticeships and specifically about electrical trade apprenticeships. Minister, I want you to look to the gallery above you. Sitting there are a number of young Ontarians who all want to become electricians. Each of these

Ontarians has brought with them today their prospective employer, an electrical contractor who is interested in hiring them as electrical trade apprentices but can't because of the regulations governing journeyman-apprenticeship ratios. Minister, will you draft new regulations that will ensure that these young people can get an apprenticeship position in their chosen field?

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): To ensure that there are more positions in the trades, we have the apprenticeship training tax credit, which enhances the incentive for employers to take on apprentices; we've invested in in-class placements to ensure that, once they get their place, they will be able to carry through; we have invested in additional programs to ensure that those who need to can get from high school to employers; and we've set up an apprenticeship action table to work with businesses, contractors, labour unions and educators to find the issues, such as ratios, which might be holding apprentices back, but to ensure that those who are taken on are taken on where it's safe, where they're going to get the type of apprenticeship experience they need to pass, to become journeypersons. At the end of the day, it's all about ensuring that we have the right supply of skilled journeypersons for the businesses and labour in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Wilson: Safety is a red herring that people use because they don't want to change the ratios. Nine other provinces and territories have accepted a one-to-one ratio—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order.

The member for Simcoe-Grey.

Mr. Wilson: Nine other provinces and territories, including BC and Alberta, have accepted a one-to-one ratio between journeyman and electrical apprentice. You are simply in the pockets of the union, Minister. You will not change the ratios. What could be safer—use your brain—than one electrician and one electrical apprentice? What could be safer? And yet you use that excuse, and the excuse has been used for years.

You have lost manufacturing jobs to the tune of 113,000 in the last 18 months in this province. You've got young people sitting above you today, with their prospective employers. If you would only make a small regulatory change, they could get on with their lives and get a good job in the electrical field.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Eight and a half years you sat in the Legislature, and in eight and a half years you did nothing: didn't invest in the programs, didn't invest in the placements, didn't invest in the apprenticeship training tax credit. Where was the passion and the fire and the energy then? It was absent. In fact, he would know that the ratio is one-to-one, two-to-one, and it only does not vary at the one-to-one above five.

But I will say very directly to him and to those who want to be apprentices that health and safety is never an irrelevant issue. Some 300,000 people were injured in the province of Ontario when we became the government.

They cut health and safety inspectors. We restored them. We're reducing the injuries. We want you to get a job but we want you to stay alive. That's our commitment now, today, and always in the province of Ontario.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is for the Premier. I'm asking the Premier this question because it involves many ministries.

Ontarians with disabilities have historically faced barriers to full citizenship and participation. In 2005, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act was enacted to recognize and to address those very barriers. Ontario now seeks ways to engage citizens, with their government and their communities, in electoral change. Barriers to access to democratic and electoral processes are still continuing to face persons with disabilities, those candidates, volunteers and electors during provincial and municipal elections.

My question is a complicated one. Can you tell members of this House what your actions, timelines and implementation of regulations are under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the Ontario Elections Act and the Municipal Elections Act to ensure equal access for candidates, volunteers and electors to be allowed to participate fully and, most importantly, to ensure that ballots are available in accessible formats?

1540

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): As you know, this House has adopted unanimously the Ontarians with Disabilities Act in May 2005. Since then, we have been working very hard. We are developing standards to ensure that all Ontario will be fully accessible by 2025. When I say that, 2025 is the end, not the beginning. So my ministry is working very hard and very closely with the employer community, with the municipalities, with all sectors in developing standards to ensure that Ontario will be fully accessible.

We already have two standards that have been developed, and we are working on the third standard. We are choosing the members of this committee, and we will move forward soon on the third one.

Mr. Prue: Madam Minister, between now and 2025 there will be at least four more municipal elections and five provincial elections. My question has to do with the electoral process and how the disabled get involved. In the spirit of this International Day of Disabled Persons, will you make a commitment to introduce and pass a government bill to include regulations on funding guidelines in the Elections Act and the Municipal Elections Act for access and accommodation provisions for persons with disabilities who are candidates, volunteers and electors, and will you do that prior to the upcoming pro-

vincial election so that they can be full participants in that election?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: I want to repeat what I've already said. We are working very closely with the business community, with the public and private sectors to ensure that Ontario will be fully accessible by 2025. We're not going to amend the legislation right now. We have to work with all our partners in the community to develop these standards, and so far it has been working very well and we have everybody on board. We will continue to work hard because probably most of us, later on, will need accessibility. We will need accessible buildings; we will need some tools to communicate; we will need accessibility in many sectors, especially in employment. So we will continue to prepare for a fully accessible Ontario by 2025.

BOTTLE RECYCLING

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, my constituents are thrilled to hear that our government will be implementing a deposit-return system for LCBO containers beginning in February 2005. I'm proud to be part of a government that is offering Ontarians more opportunity to do their part in protecting the environment and in strengthening recycling in this province. Ontarians and municipalities have been asking for a deposit-return system for years, yet the previous Conservative and NDP governments decided to ignore Ontarians and turn their backs on an initiative that will keep our province clean and green.

Minister, please tell the obviously confused members of the Conservative and NDP caucuses about this great environmental initiative.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I want to thank the member for the question. I want to say to his community of Scarborough–Rouge River to all Ontarians thank you for embracing this exciting new initiative in Ontario. Ontarians right across the province are telling me that they are anxiously awaiting February 2007. And why are they awaiting and why are they anxious to see this deposit-return program come into place? They are so anxious because deposit-return will help protect the environment and will build a better sustainable future for all of us.

Unlike the members opposite, who chose to ignore the call of municipalities and environmentalists alike who wanted to ensure that our bottles were diverted from landfill, because that is the goal of this program—in fact, the Leader of the Opposition continues to be against such a program. This is about finding ways to reduce waste. It's one of the most important issues facing our municipalities. We're pleased to be working with AMO and others to deliver, on February 1, 2007, an opportunity to better —

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Balkissoon: Minister, when the Premier announced our deposit-return program back in September,

he said that our program has the potential to divert 80 million bottles a year from landfill—wow; 80 million bottles. Clearly, a deposit-return system is the right thing to do for the environment. Obviously, the members of the Conservative and NDP caucuses have turned their backs on yet another good environmental initiative.

Even though my constituents love the blue box and recognize the blue box's great success at diverting recyclables from landfill, the reason many of my constituents have wanted to see a deposit-return system is because they believe it will divert even more containers from landfills, especially when they see that many of the bottles they put into the blue box often break. Minister, how will a deposit-return system for LCBO containers improve waste diversion in Ontario?

Hon. Ms. Broten: You're quite right that this will divert some 80 million bottles from landfill. You only need to go to one of our sorting facilities for recyclables to see what happens when the glass bottles we put into our blue box program are broken. This diversion program will ensure that our blue box is freed up to put other products in so that we can continue to divert waste, and that our beverage containers are used to their highest and best use in end uses like glass bottles or fibreglass insulation. It is a call to action across Ontario so that Ontarians know that when they're making the effort and diverting that waste, it will not end up back in landfill. We will build on the success of the blue box. We will divert 80 million bottles from landfill, and that will ensure a cleaner, greener future for generations to come.

OBSTETRICAL CARE

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. What are you doing to address the upcoming closure of the maternity ward and birthing unit at Stevenson Memorial Hospital in Alliston?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): We're working vigorously across all quarters to enhance access to health care services in the province of Ontario. We think that it's crucial that all of these services, including those mentioned by the honourable member, be provided in a fashion that appropriately balances out the capabilities of doing them in all local communities and the necessity of ensuring that they're done on a platform that offers the maximum safety for all involved. So I want to say that this is a matter that continues to receive the appropriate attention, and I look forward to the honourable member's supplementary.

Mr. Wilson: Last Wednesday, over 500 citizens gathered in Alliston to express their outrage that their local birthing unit will be shut down and there was no public consultation. Apparently, your ministry is in cahoots with the hospital board. You have provided \$1.5 million to convert the maternity ward to a women's wellness centre, with no birthing unit and without consulting the community or me.

Minister, the message from the public meeting is clear: Women in my community want to give birth in Alliston. By closing the local maternity ward, women will be forced to travel 45 minutes to Southlake hospital in Newmarket to give birth. Why don't you spend the \$1.5 million on finding new obstetricians for Stevenson Memorial Hospital so that women in my community can give birth in Alliston?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Speaking of daddies, this is awfully rich coming from the honourable member who, more than any other person in this Legislature, caused doctor shortages. It was under his auspices—

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Oh, the truth is striking the honourable member a little too close to his core. Perhaps it is that the honourable member is offended that people—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Minister.

1550

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: What we really saw in the honourable member's question was a level of sadness on his part associated with the fact that the local hospital board chooses not to see him as relevant. But that's not my decision; that's a decision that was agreed upon locally. I recommend to the honourable member that he seek to be more actively engaged in the lifeblood of the Alliston community.

In the meantime, we think it's important that obstetrical services be provided on a platform which, at the heart of it, is safe. It is not practical to provide this in every quarter. All of the evidence, all the clinical data, is so clear that it is necessary to provide these services on a platform where there is volume. And we've worked hard to enhance midwifery services in the Alliston community as one—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier: When the McGuinty government presented your scheme to privatize Ontario's human rights, some of Ontario's most vulnerable citizens objected. They objected to your scheme to force them to pay out of pocket to defend their human rights. Most importantly, your government had not bothered to talk to them about your scheme. Then you promised to hold broad public hearings, broad public consultation. You promised to listen. But now you're going to cancel the public hearings and you're going to deny democracy.

Premier, how do you justify cancelling what you promised and denying the most fundamental democratic right to citizens of this province: the right to be heard on important human rights legislation?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): In fact, the government did listen and benefited from actually

years and years of consultation—task force, commission and more—and of course a tremendous amount of debate in this Legislature. Very importantly as well, the input was received in the hearings that took place across the province. So we received recommendations from a number of groups of people such as OPSEU, AODAA and the African Canadian Legal Clinic to make amendments to the appointment criteria of commissioners. We listened to them, we heard them and we made that amendment.

We were asked by the Ontario Human Rights Commission to make amendments so that the commission would make an annual report to the people, would report to the people through the Legislature. We listened, we heard and we made those amendments.

We were asked by the Canadian Hearing Society, local agencies serving new Canadians, and the Ottawa chapter of the Chinese Canadian National Council to provide public inquiry powers, to ensure that we have enforced compliance. We listened, we heard and we made those amendments.

Mr. Hampton: B'nai Brith, the Afghan Association of Toronto, the African Canadian Legal Clinic, the Canadian Arab Federation, the Chinese Canadian National Council, the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations: All of them oppose your plan. Now you have denied them a most basic democratic right: the right to speak and be heard about your legislation that could substantially affect their lives, their human rights. Your chief Human Rights Commissioner, Barbara Hall, says you're wrong. June Callwood, of the Order of Canada, says you're wrong. Tell us, why is the McGuinty government so afraid of democracy, so afraid of real public debate and discussion on the fundamental issue of protecting human rights in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I would ask the New Democratic Party, of all parties, why they are so afraid of reform, why they are so afraid to change a human rights system that has been the subject of talk about reform for so many years. The New Democratic Party minister rose in the House in 1991 to say, "But the" human rights "backlog is symptomatic of a more fundamental problem: outdated enforcement procedures that cannot respond to the increasing and complex cases of today."

NDP ministers, NDP members and an NDP-assigned task force have been calling for reforms of this system for many years. We have heard, have listened to and will continue to listen to Ontarians in their calls for reform. I know he disagrees with the process through which we have followed, but we have an opportunity this afternoon to debate a bill before this House—and we will have that opportunity in a moment—and an opportunity to vote in this Legislature on a matter of fundamental reform that this government was calling for back in 1992.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): My question this afternoon is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last Friday's Toronto Star included

a report on a mother in Durham who was concerned that she could lose her child care fee subsidy. As a single mother she is, like many in our communities, working hard to provide for her children, but has reportedly run into some obstacles. She's concerned that her fee subsidy may be cut off.

The McGuinty government works hard every day to support hard-working families in Durham, Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge and throughout Ontario. Your ministry has been working hard to build a new model for determining child care fee subsidies. Minister, can you please tell this House: Will the new model for determining eligibility-for-fee subsidies help this mother?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'd like to thank my colleague the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge for his advocacy on behalf of families who need affordable child care.

I read that article as well and, yes, I'm very pleased to say that, from what I read in that article, that family will indeed benefit from very progressive changes that we're making to the child care system, focusing on a very simple, progressive method of determining subsidy eligibility. In fact, in January next year, we will start implementing the new income-based model. I also want parents to know that the federal government's universal child care benefit will not be included in the calculation of income for the determination of fee subsidies.

The best news is that at least 25,000 more children will benefit from this change in the calculation of fee subsidies. I would like to encourage this mother to keep the faith, because she will qualify for continued assistance.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the proposed Long-Term Care Homes Act is extremely lengthy and complex and requires full and extensive parliamentary and public debate and committee hearings throughout the province; and

"Whereas the rigid, pervasive and detailed framework proposed is excessive and will stifle innovation and flexibility in the long-term-care sector; and

"Whereas the additional burden, red tape and punitive measures imposed by the proposed legislation will aggravate and exacerbate the chronic underfunding of the sector, to the detriment of residents of the homes; and

"Whereas the proposed legislation will have serious implications for the viability of the for-profit and not-for-profit, charitable and municipal long-term-care sectors;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We demand that the McGuinty government withdraw the proposed act, or remove the offending sections, and fulfill its commitment by a substantial increase in funding on a multi-year basis in the order of the promised \$6,000 per resident, per year."

I have affixed my signature in support.

PENSION PLANS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads:

"Whereas the seniors of Ontario request full access and control of their locked-in pension funds at age 55, without the current restriction imposed by government regulation;

"Whereas the current government regulation restricts what seniors and pensioners are able to do with their own savings and limits their options for an affordable and comfortable retirement;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Pension Benefits Act be amended to give seniors of Ontario the option to transfer their locked-in pension funds (LIRA, LIF, LRIF) into an RRSP at the age of 55, as is the case for seniors in the province of Saskatchewan."

I agree with this petition and have signed it. I send it to the table by way of page Sarah.

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EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): "Whereas the Ontario government already fully funds 93% of faith-based schools in Ontario, but the remaining 7% receive no funding, solely because they are not Catholic;

"Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled in 1999 and again in 2005 that this arrangement is discriminatory and violates basic international human rights law that Ontario formally agreed to uphold;

"Whereas all three parties represented in the Legislature support Catholic separate school funding, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Canada, so that the only fair and viable solution to the discrimination is to extend funding to the small religious minorities that are currently excluded;

"Whereas the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Ontario has the constitutional power to provide funding to non-Catholic faith-based schools;

"Whereas Ontario is the only western democracy that fully funds faith-based schools of one religion to the total exclusion of all other religions, while all other provinces except the Atlantic provinces fund faith-based schools and have thriving public school systems;

"Whereas the cultural survival of the affected minority groups is at stake;

"Whereas faith-based schools produce responsible and productive citizens; and

"Whereas the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Religious Schools in December 2004 submitted to the Minister of Education a detailed proposal for the funding of non-Catholic faith-based schools in a manner that is fair and accountable and protects and enhances the public interest;

"We call on the Ontario Legislature to pass legislation to provide equitable funding in respect of all faith-based schools in Ontario without religious discrimination and without any reduction in funding for public education, with accountability requirements and standards in place to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded."

I support this petition. I affix my signature and I will pass it on to page Kelsea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I regret to inform the members who still have petitions that, pursuant to standing order 30(b), it being 4 p.m., I am now required to call orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HUMAN RIGHTS CODE

AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LE CODE

DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE

Mr. Bryant moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 107, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code /
Projet de loi 107, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Bryant has moved third reading of Bill 107, and I'll return to the Attorney General for his leadoff speech.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): Thank you, Speaker. We have today an opportunity to speak to Bill 107. This is third reading debate. I would anticipate that there will be some discussion about the process that got us here. There will be some discussion about the process that is the current system, and I will be speaking to that as well. Of course, we have had a debate around the process. We have had a debate on the time allocation motion, and all parties were heard on that subject. That matter went to the House, on which there was a vote, and now we are here to speak, I hope, to the substance of the bill. I am concerned that we will end up having a debate about the process that led to this moment, and maybe the process that is the current system.

As I went back and looked at the third reading debate for the legislation that consolidated all of the human rights laws in Ontario and established in law the Human Rights Commission—and at the time it was the commission alone; there was no Human Rights Tribunal—you will see that the debate was all about the substance. In fact, they were debating an amendment to the bill as to whether or not age discrimination ought to be a part of our human rights system. The government position was that the ability to enforce it was not yet there. The gov-

ernment, led by Premier Robarts, and the official opposition's position was that we needed to enshrine that right and address issues of enforcement, I guess, on another day. It was discussion about not only the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but also the innovations and statutes that existed in Canada and in Ontario at the time. It was a debate about the substantive rights that were covered under the human rights system and a specific debate about whether or not the breadth of human rights were, under the Human Rights Code as it was existing at that time during that debate on March 1, 1962, adequately protected in the province of Ontario. It was a debate where the government was concerned about the breadth of the Human Rights Code of the day, but also the importance and the ability to enforce those rights.

The leader of the official opposition has spoken with great pride about the fact that he shares a party name with one Premier Robarts, who created our human rights complaint system that we have today, and did so in 1962. I would encourage him to read the speeches of Mr. Robarts of that time and to see that the discussion was not around the legislative process. The discussion was not around, in fact, the specific mechanisms to enforce human rights, although he was concerned about the idea of having rights without a remedy, something that this government is very concerned about many, many years later.

There has been some discussion about the historical accuracy of saying that this is the first time that we have changed the human rights complaint system since 1962. It is the first time in which we have before the Legislature a bill that will change the human rights complaint system since 1962; it is not the first time that the Human Rights Code has been amended. It is not, and that point has been made by several people quite helpfully. Certainly, nobody in the government benches means to suggest for a moment that the Human Rights Code has not been amended from time to time, because it has. It has been amended by the Conservative government; it has been amended, as was said by the Premier, by the Peterson government, specifically by Attorney General Scott. But the complaint system has basically been the same one that has existed since 1962, at least in legislation.

Of course, there have been changes to the complaint system over the years. It is because of those changes that we have had, for some time now—for, I would say, 20 years, but certainly this Legislature has been debating this subject since 1990-91—the prospect of reforming the enforcement procedures that exist right now. The rough history that was presented to me in the last seven years that I've been in this House with respect to the human rights system since 1962 is something like this: that the Human Rights Commission was given the ability to resolve human rights complaints, and did so. But the commission had two focuses: Firstly, to promote human rights and prevent human rights discrimination was one of its focuses and, secondly, to resolve complaints.

I'm advised that for many years the system worked extremely well, was a model human rights complaint

system for the rest of the country, and the rest of the country followed and formed human rights systems that are very similar, if not identical, to Ontario's. Then what happened over the years was—and, I'm told, at some point in the 1980s—a series of rulings, a series of changes, a change in terms of the volume of cases that went into the system.

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A number of other factors led to what I would call process gridlock that backlogs the system in a chronic way. It certainly did not help that from time to time in governments past there were budget cuts to the Human Rights Commission. I'm very proud to serve in a government where we have increased the budget for our human rights system every year that we've been in office. I know that I have made the point in question period before and in debate that governments past, Conservative governments and NDP governments too, actually, back to back—there was a time there in the 1990s where they received back-to-back-to-back-to-back cuts from both NDP and Conservative governments, budget cuts, to the system.

I think it's an error to imagine that resolving these backlogs could simply be found through fiscal remedies, although, as I've said, we have made budgetary increases to the human rights system and will continue to do so. But rather, we need to address what Minister Ziemba said on December 10, 1991, when she rose in the House on International Human Rights Day. She was the Minister of Citizenship and the minister responsible for human rights at the time. She said, "Clearing the backlog of cases is absolutely critical to providing justice to complainants who have waited far too long." This is in 1991. This isn't 2001; this isn't a couple of years ago. This is 15 years ago in this House that the minister responsible for the human rights system said, "But the backlog is symptomatic of a more fundamental problem: outdated enforcement procedures that cannot respond to the increasing and complex cases of today." And so the government of the day announced the creation of a task force to undertake, in her words, "an independent review of the procedures for the enforcement of human rights in Ontario, and to make recommendations for amendments to the code to ensure a fair and practical enforcement process."

The government appointed task force chairperson Mary Cornish, who was described as "a lawyer, co-founder of Ontario's Equal Pay Coalition and long-standing human rights activist." Minister Ziemba of the New Democratic Party said, in 1991, "We are very fortunate to have someone of her expertise and stature to head this review."

The task force was given six months to complete their review and provide the government with a report of the findings, conclusions and recommendations in the summer of 1992.

The minister talked about the consultations that she had had with a range of individuals and groups across the province and the reform and what she referred to as the "informal process," which "generated a lot of ideas and

suggestions, but the top priority," the government said in 1991, "is the need for an overhaul of human rights enforcement procedures."

That's what this bill—

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Quorum call, please.

The Acting Speaker: Would the table assist me to ascertain if there is a quorum?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I'll return to the Attorney General.

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I appreciate Mr. Kormos's intervention there. I don't know if it's out of envy or embarrassment that he hears a former NDP minister talking about his government's commitment to reforming enforcement procedures. It is, in fact, a part of our history and a part of our Legislature that we've been debating this matter for so long. It is important, I think, to understand not only how many people have been calling for changes to our human rights system and for how long, but also the broad range of people who have been calling for changes to our human rights system, and that includes the NDP government of the day.

So what happened to that task force that was created and brought in by the NDP government? It came in and the task force recommended a direct access system. A direct access system allowed a person who had a human rights complaint to go directly to a tribunal to get a remedy for what they believed to be a moment of discrimination. As I say, the purpose of the 1962 human rights complaint system that was established in law was to provide remedies for these legal rights that existed in the common law and in various statutes, had not been consolidated as they were back in 1962 and did not have a place to which a person who was a victim of discrimination could turn to to get a remedy.

My concern is that we have known for so long that the complaint system and the changes that were brought upon it, in fact, brought us back, to some degree, to a place where, for many, many people who were turning to our human rights complaint system, they found that they had these rights on paper and in law, but had no place to obtain a remedy. If I could sum up why this bill is before this Legislature today, it is for that.

You're going to hear about different processes. You're going to hear about different ways to achieve—I hope we're going to hear about that—the goal. But I would have thought that the goal is the same, and that is to provide a remedy for people's human rights. Yes, we have this great Human Rights Code in Ontario that led the nation, but for too many Ontarians it has been the case that it has been a Human Rights Code with too many dead letters, too many rights on paper that were not translating into rights with remedies for Ontarians.

1620

The reason that the Cornish task force recommended to the NDP government of the day a direct access system was because they felt that was the best means to that end. The goal, the end, was not the process itself. It wasn't about direct access being the vastly superior and only way in which to deliver the remedy. It was seen as preferable to the enforcement procedures of the day, based on the experience of that time and, to a certain degree, also based on the evolution of Canadians' experience with human rights.

Do you remember 1962? There was not even a Canadian Bill of Rights at the time. There was certainly no Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. So in 1962, a complaint system was set up. Now, it was set up for a lot of very good reasons. If somebody felt they were a victim of a human rights injustice in early 1962, before the bill was before the Legislature, basically that person could retain counsel at their own expense, not with publicly supported legal support, they would have to bring their matter and sue the respondent via either existing statutory right or under the common law, tort law, and they would go before the superior court of the day. Without meaning to in any way be critical of the superior court of the day, this was not a court which had the human rights expertise that a human rights commission or tribunal would have. So the system at the time was: You're on your own.

Again, if I can sum up in brief what we are trying to do today, it's to better provide public support to people who are seeking to get a remedy for their human right. Instead of going to the Human Rights Commission—although they'll be able to go to the Human Rights Commission under this new system, if this law passes in a vote before this Legislature, for systemic matters. They will be able to get assistance from the Human Rights Commission and see the Human Rights Commission as an intervener in matters that go before the tribunal—an intervener, I should add, as a right under this legislation, thanks to amendments that were brought to the bill at the behest of the Human Rights Commission to entrench the powers they felt were important. We listened to them and ensured they were in this bill by way of the amendments that we brought before the standing committee on justice and social policy.

The goal is to provide a human rights legal support centre, which was not seen as having appropriate clarity in the original form of Bill 107. That led to the call for amendments to clarify the role of the human rights legal support centre, which was provided in the amendments that were brought to the justice committee. The human rights legal support centre will be there, a new pillar of the human rights system, alongside the commission and the tribunal, that will provide support to Ontarians as they come forth with complaints to the human rights system; a place where people can get advice and representation; a place, obviously publicly funded, where Ontarians will be able to get the public support that they did not have before the human rights complaint system was brought in prior to 1962. So you get that support, but you also get expertise.

The Human Rights Commission has long embodied the expertise in the human rights system that made the Human Rights Commission, at the time it was created, a leader in the nation, one which people in other provinces and other countries turned to.

I think, going back to the two purposes of the commission, that at some point along the way, one of those purposes was not being served, not because the commission did not want to serve it—believe me, it did—but the Human Rights Commission at some point—and I don't know if it happened in the 1980s, I don't know when it happened in the 1980s, but it certainly happened at some point, and it was recognized by the NDP government in 1991—became primarily a complaint resolution institution. If you look at the work of the commission, the way in which it spends its money and the way in which it does its work and its budget, the vast majority of the work that the Human Rights Commission has been doing in the last few years—I would argue, in the last 15 years—has been overwhelmingly focused on the complaints resolution process. Yet every year, they have still managed to do an incredible job to educate the public, to be sure, to bring forth very independent reports, to hold governments and other public and private institutions' feet to the fire. In doing so, it has played that role of promoting human rights and seeking to prevent human rights discrimination. But its ability to do so is significantly limited by the fact that most of its budget is devoted towards the complaint resolution process.

What this new system that we're proposing in this bill will do, the bill that is before the Legislature in the form of Bill 107 that we are debating today, is to give the commission the ability to, yes, promote human rights and prevent human rights discrimination by allowing it to focus primarily on that, but also to do something that is very important. It is part of a response to—I'm sorry to call it the new generation of human rights discrimination; it's not all that new at all—systemic discrimination, which in the case of some institutions unfolds unwittingly, in some cases not so unwittingly, whereby statistically it becomes very clear that there are barriers, often glass ceilings—not the kind of discrimination that was the focus of the debate in 1962, where they were debating whether or not to add age discrimination as a grounds of discrimination within the Ontario human rights system, but something that is far more subtle, pervasive and arguably extremely destructive.

The Human Rights Commission will have powers under this bill to bring forth claims of systemic discrimination on behalf of Ontarians; not just the 2,000 or 3,000 Ontarians who bring complaints to the human rights system every year, who, I am arguing and this bill argues, the Cornish task force argues, the United Nations Human Rights Committee reports argue, the La Forest commission argues and many Ontarians who came and spoke to this government and spoke to the justice committee also argued by way of a direct access system—it's a preferable way to provide remedies for human rights infringements. Not only does this bill allow for that direct

access to provide a real, timely and effective remedy for Ontarians facing discrimination, but it allows for the commission to go forth and bring systemic claims on behalf of those Ontarians who don't come to the human rights system.

Maybe they don't come to the human rights system because they have heard and understood that if they go to the human rights system, they will not see a remedy for years, notwithstanding the hard work and all of the efforts undertaken by the people who work in our human rights system, and the commission in particular, because of the process gridlock that unfolded over the years. In fact, it was brought upon the commission, and this process gridlock is upon the commission; it was upon the commission, I would argue, in 1991. It wasn't just me who argued it; it was Minister Ziemba who said that the backlog "is symptomatic of a more fundamental problem: outdated enforcement procedures that cannot respond to the increasing and complex cases of today."

That was 1991. So much time has passed and so many people have continued to be caught up in the web of this process gridlock. So many people thereby have been denied the remedies that they deserve and they expect, and they should expect. They read in the Human Rights Code that they have these rights and then they turn to the system and find that the remedies are not forthcoming, in many cases, for just far, far too long.

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By enabling this focus on systemic discrimination by the Human Rights Commission and giving them powers under this bill, through the amendments in particular—amendments that they asked for and that we worked very closely with the commission to develop—the commission will be able to bring remedies for so many thousands of Ontarians who right now would not otherwise have that opportunity. They can do so by way of complaints, applications, if you like, directly to the tribunal, or they may bring it as an intervener before the tribunal as the tribunal is considering a particular case. That is what this bill is all about. As we hear calls for rights to a particular process, I would ask Ontarians to consider the many people who work in our human rights system and have contributed to the task force's studies, consultations, papers, reviews and reports. I'd ask them to consider the fact that this Legislature has been considering for many years the importance of providing a remedy for these rights, these rights that are Ontarians' rights and these remedies that they incredibly deserve.

Bill 107 has been discussed. It has been considered. It has been praised. It has been criticized. It has been debated in academic forums, in conferences, in meetings, in community halls, in news conferences held by a whole variety of groups. Certainly we've seen a considerable amount of attention in newspaper columns and opinion pages, in committee hearings, in the halls, the corridors of the Legislature and, of course, here in this chamber as well. We've heard from a wide variety of advocates in our human rights system. We've heard from women's organizations, human rights groups, community activists,

cultural organizations, disability groups. We've heard from the academy, from legal clinics, from former human rights commissioners. We've heard from the people who work in the system every day and have been working in the system every day. We've heard from labour organizations. We've heard from individual citizens. We've heard from complainants past and their experiences. Their testimony speaks to the real injustices that come from justice delayed and justice denied that was flowing from the process gridlock that has been in place for so long and so clearly needed change in 1991, as was acknowledged by the NDP government of the day and is being recognized and accepted. We're moving forward with those Cornish task force recommendations in this bill.

We proposed a number of amendments to improve the bill. We heard from a wide variety of groups. We heard from groups who disagreed with this bill and who brought forward changes nonetheless. I appreciate the fact that the people who disagreed with the direct-access approach nonetheless brought forward recommendations for changes. Many of those recommendations are found in the amendments that were put before the justice committee. I recognize that in the time that I have here, it is important to recognize the contribution they made, but there are a lot of amendments, and a lot of people who contributed to those amendments. In addition to the commission, I also—

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Bryant: The justice critic for the third party laughs at the contributions made by the Human Rights Commission. In fact, the commission did participate, I say to the member, in these amendments. As I acknowledged at the time, the work that the commission did resulted in a lot of changes to the bill. It is a great credit to the people who worked on those changes that the vast majority of the changes they asked for are found in this bill.

I know the justice critic for the third party is going to want to talk about the process that led to this debate and I know he's going to want to talk about the right to process; that is his clarion call. I'm more interested in, and I believe that Ontarians are more interested in, what the NDP government said they were interested in in 1991, and that was providing remedies for those rights. The discussion in the debate in 1962, the discussion in 1991, when there was talk finally about addressing the fundamental problem of outdated enforcement procedures, was about the substance, the rights, the problem of somebody being denied their human rights in Ontario and how quickly we can get their remedy—not the process rights that I know the third party today clings to with enormous fervour, but the substance, the need to provide remedies to injustices that take place to Ontarians. It is my view, and I believe it is the view of most Ontarians, that to heap another injustice on top of that by providing people with nothing more but year after year after year of no remedy at all heaps injustice upon further injustice.

Who came forward to support Bill 107? The individual and organizational advocates of women's equal-

ity rights, including the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, the Chatham-Kent Women's Centre, the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children, the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, the coalition of community legal clinics, including Ruth Carey of the HIV and AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario, Kathy Laird of the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, and the Canadian Auto Workers, as well as a number of individuals who have had an opportunity to work in our human rights system.

I'm looking in the members' gallery at a former human rights chief commissioner, Raj Anand, who not only made a contribution to this debate but has been working in this system for so many years and came to the standing committee to talk about his experience in the system, not only at the time in which he was the chief commissioner of the Human Rights Commission, but also his experience in terms of trying to assist people who were working in the system today. We heard from past Chief Commissioner Frazee, who also lent her voice of support for Bill 107, who again talked about her experience in the system, not only at the time in which she was leading the system, but also the time in which she was working in human rights, the most recent past, and of course again today.

I want to spend the remaining time talking about the future in the event that Bill 107 receives the support of this Legislature, because anytime you change a complaints system for the first time in more than 40 years, you're going to have a tough, hard and vigorous debate. That has happened. As I said many times, we've been having that debate in this Legislature quite literally for more than 15 years. We've been having that debate by way of question period, second reading debate—now third reading debate—and committee time for more than 200 days, in addition to the time that we spent consulting with Ontarians, and in addition to, of course, the task force brought about by the NDP government.

But in the event that Bill 107 receives the support of this Legislature, people are going to be, obviously, working with the government to try and ensure that this bill is implemented in the way that I would hope everybody would want it to be implemented—again, not presuming to know what the Legislature will do with this bill.

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So I can thank in advance not only people like former Chief Commissioner Raj Anand and former Chief Commissioner Catherine Frazee, and I can not only thank in advance the people who have supported Bill 107, but I certainly want to say on behalf of the government that we also very much want to work with those people who I understand played a significant role in this debate. They may not have agreed with the direct access system, but I know they agree with public assistance and support for complainants, I know they agree with having effective remedies for victims of discrimination and I know they agree that the goal is timely access to justice. We may have to agree to disagree on how much process rights we

need to surround the substantive rights that need to be delivered to Ontarians.

But I do want to say that this government does wish to work with those people—and I mean everybody—who have participated in the past and will be participating in the future in our human rights system, no matter what happens with this debate and not presuming to know what the Legislature will do with this bill. I want to say to all those people that we do wish to sit down with you, that we do wish to work with you, that we do want to have you working together on the implementation of this bill, that we do want to ensure that in fact people are getting that public assistance and we want to work with you to determine the best way to deliver that. We want to do what I hope all members of this Legislature want to do, and that's to deliver timely remedies to the rights that Ontarians deserve. I hope that is what all members of this Legislature want. That's certainly what this government wants. I look forward to working with members of this Legislature and all Ontarians on this important reform in the future.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): Bill 107 was meant to be about hope, about equality and about justice for all Ontarians. Instead, it's about a denial of justice for the most vulnerable people in our society. The people who most needed the government to be their advocate, to protect and advance their rights as valued citizens, have been betrayed. It did not have to be like this.

I was not a member of this Legislature when the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act was passed in June 2005, but I'm told it was considered to be tremendously significant in advancing the cause of accessibility and inclusivity for disability and racialized minority groups in Ontario. At the time however, many were concerned about the enforcement provisions of the act. But they were assured by the Attorney General that the Human Rights Commission would be strengthened and would be the appropriate enforcement agency.

In February 2006, the Attorney General announced that there would be an overhaul of the Human Rights Code and that all interested groups would be given the opportunity to provide input with respect to the changes that would be required to enhance and strengthen the commission and the tribunal. No one at this time had any reason for concern, based on the Attorney General's previous assertions that the commission would be the appropriate enforcement agency and that full consultation would take place.

Imagine, then, the sense of betrayal felt by so many individuals and groups when the Attorney General announced first reading of Bill 107 on April 26 of this year. Reaction from the communities most affected was immediate. There was outrage when the Attorney General implied that he had been engaging in consultation prior to the introduction of the legislation. During first reading, he stated, "This legislation is the culmination of perhaps more study and consultation than ever before in the history of this Legislature." The day following first

reading, the Premier stood up in an attempt to corroborate this statement and said, "To provide a bit more information to the Leader of the Opposition and to the House with respect to with whom the minister consulted, just some of those groups include: the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, the African Canadian Legal Clinic, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act Committee"—and the list continued.

In a letter dated May 1 to the Premier, Margaret Parsons, executive director of the African Canadian Legal Clinic, stated, "We read with great concern your remarks in the Legislature on April 27, 2006, with respect to your government's human rights bill. The African Canadian Legal Clinic has not been consulted at any time by the Attorney General on this bill. To the contrary, we have been ignored and deliberately excluded by the Attorney General and his staff from consultations on this bill, despite our many requests." She continues on to say at the end of her letter, "It is indeed a shame that your government continues to mislead the public on the consultation process."

In fact, several groups announced quite forcefully that they had not been consulted. Interestingly enough, I should point out that three of the groups the Premier chose to highlight as groups with whom the Attorney General had consulted would later form a coalition to express their indignation at the government's decision to invoke closure on this bill without consultation.

At any rate, at the time the Attorney General said, "No problem" to all these groups: "we are going to be consulting with you," and he went on to state, "With this introduction of the bill, we are seeking to advance the debate. We need to continue to have public debate and consultation. That must continue. We will continue to meet with those in the human rights community to get their input as the bill progresses through the Legislature, and I look forward to province-wide public hearings on this bill to take place as soon as possible."

So even though there were still significant doubts on the bill, everyone wanted to believe that it would be amended and that they would be consulted, and so it was left.

I should note at this point that there's no question that all of the parties—the official opposition and the third party, as well as the government—agreed that there need to be changes to the Human Rights Code, that there are significant delays and backlogs, it needs to be modernized and so on, but at no point did we ever have the opportunity to have a discussion with respect to anything other than the direct-access model. That was the only thing that was presented. That was the only thing we were allowed to continue to debate.

There were a number of groups that were quite frustrated at the lack of some other ways of dealing with modernizing and amending the bill. There were some interesting comments that were made by a number of presenters on this point, specifically Ms. Elisabeth Brückmann from the Parkdale Legal Clinic. I have some significant quotations from her evidence before the

justice policy committee. Also, Mr. John Rae from the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance had some suggestions about how the existing system could be reformed in a much more cost-effective manner, but again that was something we were never really allowed to fully consider.

In any event, the justice policy committee hearings were then scheduled, after the announcements by the Attorney General, and took place in early August in London, Thunder Bay and Ottawa. It was known at that point that the hearings would also take place in Toronto at a later date.

In the spirit of co-operation and based on the Attorney General's assertion that full consultation was necessary in order to realize meaningful and effective change to the Human Rights Code, it was unanimously agreed in committee in August that every attempt would be made to accommodate everyone who wished to present, because it was such an important and fundamental issue. Arrangements were therefore made to lengthen the hours for the hearings, and I should note that the committee staff went above and beyond in order to accommodate that. We had some quite lengthy hearing days that were attended of course by all members of the committee, and the staff was very gracious in accommodating those requests.

But in all three locations essentially the same points were made. The overwhelming number of presenters were, first of all, upset that the Attorney General had proceeded to committee hearings without consultation on the drafting of the bill in the first place, and with respect to the content of the bill, they were concerned that the direct-access model, coupled with the reduced role of the commission, would mean that complainants would be left without adequate representation and would be forced to act on their own behalf throughout the entire process. This would, in their view, and as expressed to us in committee, be even worse than the existing system, because at least with the existing system, the commission staff investigate the complaints and assist in bringing issues before the tribunal if a case is warranted.

It should be noted that even the supporters of the bill in the committee hearings supported the bill with such significant caveats that it really could be argued that in fact they didn't support the bill at all. The major problem with the bill from their perspective was the fact that the legal support centre which was the supposed third pillar of the legislation, along with the Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, was not entrenched in the legislation itself. There was a real concern that it didn't have any substance and that it actually wasn't going to be what it was supposed to be.

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Instead, paragraph 46 of the bill, as originally drafted, provided that the Attorney General could make financial arrangements with other service providers in order to be able to provide the necessary legal services. In fact, that's the problem with the direct-access model being advanced

in the bill, from the perspective of the PC Party. The notion of direct access is not in and of itself objectionable, but the Cornish and La Forest reports, both of which advocated the direct-access model, indicated that the direct-access model would fail if the legal support centre was not fully funded. Though I wasn't present, I can imagine that these hearings were a little bit of a cause for concern at the Ministry of the Attorney General because they didn't indicate the level of support that I believe was originally anticipated.

The matter lay dormant until late October, when the justice policy committee met again to plan and organize the hearings for Toronto. Both the member for Niagara Centre, Mr. Kormos, and I indicated that it was important that all who wished to present be given the opportunity to do so, given the importance of the subject and also the fact that the precedent had been established during the travelling committee hearings in August. There was general agreement that the hearings would be fully advertised, at a total cost of \$106,000. It was also understood that the hearings would need to continue into the winter months in order to accommodate the many, many groups and individuals who wished to present. The list outstanding from the first ads contained over 160 individuals and groups, and it was certainly anticipated that the second round of ads would result in many more presenters.

The report by the subcommittee was presented to the committee on the first day of Toronto hearings on November 15 and was unanimously accepted by all members of the committee. The Attorney General had asked to appear before the committee on the 15th, and again, in the spirit of allowing everyone who wanted to appear before the committee to do so, there was unanimous consent. The Attorney General indicated at that time that he would be tabling a number of amendments to the bill that would strengthen and clarify it. He provided a document which purported to explain the amendments, but in fact it did nothing more than muddy the waters and cause even greater anxiety, concern and frustration on the part of the many individuals and organizations concerned about the bill.

At this point, I would like to quote from a letter that was sent by Ms. Toni Silberman—she is the immediate past president of the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada—to Premier McGuinty on November 21. She indicated, "A subsequent technical briefing delivered by Ministry of the Attorney General's staff confirmed our fears that the amendments were not, in fact, amendments, but further amorphous promises with neither the fullness of thought nor the wherewithal necessary to implement them."

Then, without warning, the McGuinty muzzle motion was introduced on November 21. The effect of the motion was to invoke closure on Bill 107 and to choke off all further debate. All presentations after November 23 were summarily cancelled, even though there were still ads appearing in local newspapers for winter hearings. Among other things, what a total waste of taxpayers' money.

To say that there was outrage among the communities most affected is an understatement. I would like to quote from a sampling of the comments made by a number of groups and individuals with respect to the McGuinty muzzle motion. Again, in her letter to Premier McGuinty of November 21, Ms. Silberman stated, "We now understand that the government has filed, without warning, a motion, not only to cut off public hearings on the bill, but also to force short debates ... on so-called amendments and third reading. We find this action unconscionable because the first four days of hearings were replete with supporters of the bill. Many of those who oppose the bill were scheduled to appear through the rest of the month and throughout December, having submitted their request months ago. They will no longer be afforded that opportunity, having spent months preparing their submissions. These are the very individuals and groups that the Attorney General did not consult prior to drafting its widely criticized reform of the human rights system. And their views are being muzzled. It is ironic that the government is denying them the right to a hearing before the standing committee, when the government's strongest argument in favour of Bill 107 is the fact that it supposedly ensures everyone a right to a hearing at the Human Rights Tribunal." How ironic indeed.

I'd like to quote from a letter sent by Ms. Barbara Hall, the current human rights commissioner, also to the Premier and also dated November 21, wherein she stated, "I wish to express my profound dismay at your government's notice to invoke closure and prematurely end debate on Bill 107," an act to reform the human rights act.

Further on in the letter she also stated, "It may seem trite to remind you that justice must not only be done, but must be seen to be done. This is an essential truth within the law and, particularly, in regard to human rights. Such rights have come to form the foundation of our democratic principles. There are those who will see your actions as a denial of those principles."

In conclusion, Ms. Hall stated, "On behalf of the commission, I urge you to withdraw the motion for closure. This should be a time to encourage discussion, for consultation and for healing of divisions. All sides share the goal of a stronger, more effective human rights system for Ontarians and care passionately about human rights. It is crucial in this context to seek common ground, for the sake of the people we both serve. Please, let their voices be heard."

Finally, in a further letter from Ms. June Callwood, also addressed to the Premier and to the Attorney General and dated November 21—it should be noted that Ms. Callwood was one of the early proponents of the direct-access model—she stated, "To my great dismay, these hearings have been cancelled, and the government will not have the benefit of listening to thoughtful analysis of those elements which could in future cause some injustice."

"This bill is much too valuable to be hurried through these critical final stages. I beg you, I urge you, to reschedule the hearings."

"We all want what you want—the finest solutions to the human rights process that can be produced."

Notwithstanding the comments made by these very eminent and incredible people, the government refused to budge.

There are many significant concerns with respect to the substantive provisions of Bill 107 that remain unresolved because of the McGuinty muzzle motion.

First, the Liberal members of the justice policy committee defeated our proposed amendment—that is, proposed by the official opposition—that would entrench in the bill a person's right to have their case heard within one year. The Attorney General had stated that, under this bill, cases would be heard within one year. During debate on the motion to invoke closure on this bill, the Attorney General stated, "This is a process where somebody can go to the human rights system and within a year you can get a result. That's justice." If that were his intention, then why was he not prepared to entrench it in the legislation? Nothing in this bill, as amended, sets any timelines within which a case must be heard.

Secondly, the Attorney General promised that the new process would be "stronger, faster and more effective to better serve the people of our province." Well, there are several reasons why this is unlikely to be the case.

Pursuant to sections 37, 38 and 39 of the bill, the Human Rights Tribunal can make its own rules and establish its own procedures, subject to the requirement of fairness. Although I believe it was intended that the process be made more flexible so that it would be easier for complainants to present their case before the tribunal, the fact is that the issue of fairness is subjective. Fairness to the members of the tribunal might not be fairness to the complainant who's trying to advance his or her complaint before the tribunal.

The situation is also made much worse by the fact that the tribunal is not bound by the rules of natural justice that are established within the boundaries of the Statutory Powers Procedure Act. In the case of a dispute between the rules set out in the SPPA and the rules established by the tribunal, the latter will prevail.

Moreover, the bill gives the tribunal the authority to independently examine witnesses and even to conduct its own inquiry to review a complaint. This is a huge departure from the commonly established rules for administrative tribunals, and has the potential to lead to an inquisitorial system wherein the tribunal members can potentially hijack a proceeding and leave both complainants and respondents without the ability to control their own presentations, arguments and evidence. It certainly can be argued, and I would submit to you, that this is not a course of action that should be followed and it is not in the best interests of all Ontarians, particularly when it comes to the advancement of human rights.

1700

There's also the significant concern remaining regarding the role of the Human Rights Commission in the future. The Attorney General has indicated that the intention of the change was to free the commission from the

requirement of investigating individual complaints and to allow it to pursue education, advocacy and investigation of complaints of discrimination that are systemic in nature. Many presenters, however, expressed the concern that it was difficult, if not impossible, to separate individual from systemic cases of discrimination. This was commented on by a number of presenters, but I would like to quote from one of the presenters who was quite eloquent and very aptly made a number of arguments with respect to this point. Her name is Elisabeth Brückmann, and she's a staff lawyer with the Parkdale legal clinic. She noted that there was a long list of legal aid clinics on the list of supporters of the bill but, in fact, very few of these clinics had any experience with matters before the Human Rights Tribunal. I'd like to quote directly from her testimony before the justice policy committee on November 22 on several occasions, the first of which is:

"We were really quite surprised when we saw that 55 legal clinics had signed on to a letter urging the government to move forward with this supposed reform. We were dismayed when a number of our colleagues at other clinics—Kathy Laird from ACTO and a number of others from two other clinics—spoke and said they were speaking for the clinic system. I took a look at the list at the back of this letter. I realized that what was not noted is whether these clinics practise human rights law. I can tell you that the vast majority do not. It's not really surprising, because legal aid clinics in Ontario are extraordinarily underfunded. Clinics across the province lack the resources to assist people with human rights violations because they barely have the staff to help low-income people maintain housing or social assistance. There's just no staff time for human rights."

She then went on to say: "The debate over this crucial piece of legislation, which speaks directly to people's need for equal accessibility, is now inaccessible. A piece of legislation founded on the premise that everyone should have a right to be heard is being rammed through without everyone being heard. The promises we received from the Attorney General that the consultation notably missing from the beginning of the process—apart from one that was held 15 years ago—those promises that consultation would be held have been broken. I find it depressing and demoralizing and hypocritical. I am also, as a clinic lawyer, desperately worried, because this bill is profoundly flawed."

Finally, with respect to the separation of systemic and individual complaints, she indicated that, "First of all, the notion that systemic and individual complaints can be separated from one another is completely unrealistic. I find it very, very hard to believe that there is an expert in human rights out there who would suggest otherwise. I have never presented an individual human rights case that did not have a systemic element, because all individual cases are located in a societal context and that societal context of discrimination is brought to our attention through those individual cases. To attempt to separate the individual from the systemic is to fundamentally miss the point of how discrimination works....

"Under Bill 107, the role of the crown is lost. Each complaint loses its systemic context and it loses the societal support provided by the crown. The violations become just another private dispute between two parties. It's a contract dispute or a personal injury. While this sort of neat, private dispute may be very attractive to lawyers who want to have their matter neatly bounded, it's not what is wanted by the communities for whom maintaining a basic human rights system is an element of survival. They need to know that what they suffered is a harm that has been suffered by us all and that we all perceive ourselves as needing the crown to step forward to prosecute."

Finally, one must consider the linchpin of the bill, the most fundamental piece of the legislation, which is the legal support centre. This is where the flaws of this bill, both substantively and procedurally, converge. Bill 107, as originally drafted, provided in section 46.1(1) that "The minister may enter into agreements with prescribed persons or entities for the purposes of providing legal services and such other services as may be prescribed to applicants or other parties to a proceeding before the tribunal."

The statement by the Attorney General on November 15 before the justice policy committee did nothing to allay the concerns of those who suggested that, given the fact that the justice sector budget was flatlined through 2008-09 and that the existing legal aid system is stretched to the limit and can barely maintain and carry on with its current mandate, there's no way a fully funded legal support centre is going to be possible under this legislation.

Yet, on two occasions in this Legislature, the Attorney General assured everyone that there would be a lawyer for everyone who needed one, to and through the tribunal, in the full prosecution of their complaint. Contrast this to statements made by the minister's staff at the so-called technical briefing to stakeholders following the Attorney General's statements before the justice policy committee on November 15 and you'll see the discrepancy.

I was not in attendance at that technical briefing, but again, Ms. Bruckmann was. She also commented on that in her statement before the justice policy committee. What she had to say about it is quite revealing. Again, I'll quote: "For me, the most serious"—and this is with respect to concerns about the bill—"of these is the gaping hole that is the human rights support centre. This centre, we've been told, is the third pillar of a shiny new system, the pillar that will make direct access work. It's the pillar that's going to make our new, innovative system the envy of all. Every time a critic raises concerns about low-income people trying to navigate this new system alone, we are told, 'No, no, there will be a human rights support centre and everyone will be supported.' It is the answer for everything in Bill 107. But what does a pillar look like? We tried to find out at this technical briefing. We don't know, I don't think that any of you know, and at the technical briefing, it became clear that the Attorney

General's staff don't know. When pressed, they said, 'It's too soon to know.' We were actually told that we needed to stop thinking about worst-case scenarios and be more optimistic—you know, these are the smart people. When we pointed out that we weren't optimistic to begin with and proceeded to ask further questions, we got the same answer. Is there a budget for the centre? They don't know. Has a model been chosen? They don't know. Would it look like a legal clinic? They don't know. The Attorney General's staff does not know, and I find that terrifying. You're being asked to endorse a dramatically different model of human rights enforcement, one which failed in another province, based on 'I don't know.'

"One thing they do know, though, is that not everyone will get representation—they were clear about that—and not everyone will get a lawyer. The support of a lawyer is crucial. Human rights are very complicated; it is a complicated area of law."

It's pretty clear that Ms. Bruckmann didn't put a lot of faith in what was going to be done in order to advance the human rights centre, and, it would appear to me, with good reason. This is the most important part of this bill, and it's no wonder that people are outraged, because there are still no answers and this bill is about to be passed.

As I said at the outset, it didn't have to be this way. Since it's clear that this government has no idea yet how it's going to fund the centre, how much it's going to cost or even how it's going to operate, there is no big rush. It's clear the consultations could and should have continued on this bill, yet they've been summarily cut off and now we're never going to have the opportunity to know what the best system would be for the enforcement of human rights in Ontario.

Ms. Bruckmann, again—I'll quote her one more time because she was very eloquent on the subject. She summed it up with these comments: "The bill is a disaster waiting to happen. The bill will not make Ontario a leader in human rights. It's going to reproduce the embarrassment that the government in British Columbia faced.

"But the political fallout is not my clinic's problem. My problem is going to be the low-income people who come to our door, when all this is said and done, and say, 'I went to the commission and they sent me to the tribunal. I went to the tribunal and they sent me to the legal support centre. I went to the legal support centre and they said they couldn't take my case.' Then I'm going to have to say to them that I can't take their case either because I'm stretched thin; I can't take any more. I'm going to have to tell them that the human rights protection that they thought they had under the Human Rights Code is meaningless. This isn't just a political disaster, it is a tragedy that robs the people of Ontario of any hope of a functional human rights system."

In my submission, Ms. Bruckmann is right. How sad that a piece of legislation that could have had so much promise and could have done so much to reform the human rights system in this province has been ignored.

Debate has been choked off. We've only been given one opportunity to debate on one proposed model. I fear it is a disaster that's waiting to happen.

To conclude, we're being forced to deal with one day of third reading on this debate, and we're going to have to vote on it tomorrow. How ironic that the debate happens on the International Day of Disabled Persons. It's a really sad day in Ontario.

1710

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I want to inform everyone that I will be sharing my time with the member for Niagara Centre, who has been our very able critic with respect to this legislation.

I want to confine my remarks to the process of how we got here. I want to start out by saying that I think most fair-minded people would recognize that human rights legislation is in the nature of quasi-constitutional legislation, that it is legislation that is more important than regular bills that we might see from time to time in the Legislature. There's a good reason for that: because it defines people's human rights in the sense that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations sets out rights that are universal not just to this society but to all nations, all societies in the world. So we're not dealing with just run-of-the-mill legislation here; we are dealing with quasi-constitutional legislation that can have very deep and long-lasting effects upon people's lives and can have very deep and long-lasting effects upon whole identifiable groups of individuals.

This is the kind of legislation which in fact should receive more debate, more discussion, more examination and more cross-examination than any other bill which might proceed through this Legislature. That, I think, would be the expectation of the average citizen of Ontario. It would certainly be the expectation of anyone who has any knowledge of human rights and human rights protection. That's what we should be doing. But alas, human rights protection is being sacrificed by the McGuinty government in the political interests of the McGuinty government.

As I read Ian Urquhart's column today in the Toronto Star, I think Mr. Urquhart has correctly perceived the government's decision. This is a government that knows it's headed to an election within nine and a half months and doesn't want any discussion about this kind of fundamental issue in the run-up to an election campaign. So it has made the crass political decision and sacrificed human rights protection in order to protect the government's narrow, political, partisan interests. That's why we are here now. That's why the government has cancelled the public hearings. That's why the government has taken a battering ram to shove this legislation through the Legislature with a minimum of debate and discussion.

I'll let the government defend that kind of decision going forward from here. But I believe any fair-minded individual who looks at the process so far could not help but come away with the conclusion that I've just set out.

The government offers up excuses. One of the excuses that was offered up was that my colleague Mr. Kormos

was going to filibuster. If all nine New Democrats in the Legislature used all of our allotted time in the debate and discussion of this bill, we might be able to examine it for about a day and a half of legislative time. Apparently, what the McGuinty government is saying is that a day and a half of debate and discussion would be too much, that that is too much discussion, too much examination and cross-examination of their human rights scheme. If that is the position of the McGuinty government, then what they have put forward must indeed be flawed, because if it can't stand a day and a half of discussion by nine New Democrats, if that's their definition of filibuster, then this must indeed be fundamentally flawed, and the government doesn't want to subject it to any kind of inspection or any kind of analysis.

Why would the government not want to have its legislation subjected to that kind of analysis? Let me suggest a couple of reasons. It has been the tradition in this province that the protection of human rights is not just a private matter but a public matter, that the public has an interest in advancing and protecting human rights, that the public has an interest in ensuring that where there has been discrimination, where there have been human rights breaches, not only is the complaint of the individual person addressed, but we look at the systemic issues as well and we look at what is needed to ensure that whatever the particular breach of human rights may be, we take effective action publicly to guard against it. The McGuinty government says that there are flaws and problems with that, and there may indeed be. But what the government wants to offer up now is what we New Democrats call, in effect, the privatization of human rights. The public is going to assume a much, much smaller role, and, according to the McGuinty government, they want to see more and more private litigation. As a lawyer who's dealt with private litigation, here is the reality that is presented all too often across Ontario every day: If you have money and you can afford to litigate, you count; if you don't have money and you can't afford a lawyer, you don't count.

The government will then say, "Oh, yes, but we're going to put some money in a legal aid account" or, "We're going to put some money in a community legal clinic" or, "We're going to set aside some money to look after those folks who cannot afford a lawyer." Actions speak louder than words. The legal aid system has never been in as much trouble as it is now under the McGuinty government. Literally tens of thousands of people across Ontario are written off every day. They cannot retain a lawyer with their own resources they cannot get a legal aid certificate under the McGuinty government. They're simply told, "You don't count; you don't matter." I suggest that, given the spotty record that the government has put forward with respect to this human rights scheme, we're going to see more of the same, only now it won't just be with respect to workers' compensation; it won't just be someone who needs representation with respect to criminal law, family law or poverty law issues. Human rights issues now will also fall into the same sort of

category. If you have money and you can afford to retain a lawyer in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, your human rights count. If you don't have money and you can't afford to retain a lawyer, then join the waiting list for legal aid and discover how little your human rights count. I suggest that's where we're headed.

What is a real travesty here is, first of all, that this is a government that once again promised that it would be different. This is a government that promised not that long ago that it was going to hold extensive hearings, that it wanted to hear from all those people it had not spoken to and had not raised these issues with. And what do we find? Just as people were prepared to answer the ads in the papers, just as they were prepared to ask for time to be heard, the McGuinty government slams the door and says, "We don't want to hear from you, and whatever you have to say doesn't matter to us."

1720

In the time I've been around here, I don't think I have seen a more cavalier attitude on the part of a government, any government, with respect to human rights than we're seeing now from the McGuinty government—a completely cavalier attitude, an arrogance that says, "We don't need to talk to you; we don't need to hear from you; we don't need to consider your point of view. We're not interested in your arguments; we're not interested in your insights; we're not interested in your experience and we're not interested in how this may affect you. We, the McGuinty government, in our arrogance, know better than any and all of you. Therefore, we're simply going to roll over democratic rights. We're going to put the selfish, narrow, partisan political interests of the McGuinty government ahead of human rights protection, and people can just get over it."

If I may suggest, I don't think people are going to just get over it. This is one promise that I sincerely believe is going to come back to haunt the McGuinty government in a very big way in many communities across this province. Never have human rights or human rights protection been treated in such a cavalier fashion by any government.

Earlier today, we had an opportunity to pay tribute to a former Liberal Attorney General, Ian Scott. Let me say, if Ian Scott were here today, he would be one very angry individual. He would be very upset at the course this government has taken. He would be very upset at the process, or the lack of process, the lack of democratic process, that this government has tried to force down the throats of vulnerable groups across this province.

This is completely, completely out of line with any measures, any process taken with respect to human rights in this province in not just the last 10 years, not just the last 20 years, but the last 30 or 40 years. This will come back to haunt the McGuinty government over and over again.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I wanted to come and join what is unfortunately the tail end of this third reading debate because I just thought it was worth following on some of the comments of the

leader of the New Democratic Party and others who have spoken, and of course the very excellent job that's been done by our critic, the member for Whitby-Ajax. I really just wanted to state my profound regret at the fact that in an area such as this, where over the years we've had so many good traditions established as to how things are done in this area, this government has chosen, as the leader of the New Democratic party just said, to place its own political interests ahead of protecting and preserving and respecting those good traditions that have been established in this most important area of legislating.

I'm not sure there is another area that's more important in terms of the role we play here and the function that we perform here than the protection of basic human rights. When I talk about good traditions, I talk about the tradition that has existed throughout time. I referred in the speech I gave earlier on this subject—I've forgotten what debate it was in, but it was on Bill 107—to the fact that in years gone by there was great care taken to make sure there was multi-party co-operation on the development and passage of human rights legislation. That tradition has been abandoned.

The next point I'll come to, which is about community consensus—I'm not complaining about the fact that perhaps we haven't had time to state our point of view, but we're here on behalf of people who need to have a voice. We haven't had time because we've been choked off in our ability to talk about this matter. So the tradition of multi-party co-operation has been abandoned.

The tradition of community consensus around human rights legislation has been abandoned. It was always the case that you worked and you worked and you took the time that was necessary to make sure you had the consensus of the community, standing behind something that has been described accurately as quasi-constitutional legislation, and you tried your best to make sure that happened. That has not only been abandoned; it's been stomped on by this government under the instructions of the Premier's office. I'll come back to that in a moment. The Attorney General has not stood up and done his job in terms of making sure that that tradition, which was a good tradition, an honourable tradition in this province, was respected. There was a good tradition that complainants would know, could know and did know that when they complained, there would be someone in their corner and that they didn't have to go out and hire somebody or pay somebody. They wouldn't have to reach into their own pocket in order to advance a complaint in respect of their own human rights.

I experienced that when I was a business leader. You would get the communications from the Human Rights Commission of Ontario acting on behalf of people who had filed a complaint and who had worked for or somehow dealt with the company. The fact is that those were good people who did a good job. They may not have been resourced adequately, and I'll come back to that too, but the fact is that they did their job. People didn't have to lay out a penny from their pockets to get it done, and in many cases they settled satisfactorily those very same

complaints without people ever having to reach into their pockets or get involved in something that was excessively legalistic.

Another good tradition was that the commission had a role to play that was clearly defined and understood in terms of ensuring that systemic issues were aired and addressed. I think that, notwithstanding suggestions and amendments that were put as to how that could be made better in this legislation, which this government is in such an incredible rush to get passed for political reasons and because it's Christmas and they want a more peaceful winter, the good tradition that the commission had its clearly understood role to play in advancing and airing systemic issues has been seriously called into question.

I regret to say this, but the last one I want to mention, which I think is a good, important and time-honoured tradition around here and in other British-based Parliaments, is that the Attorneys General of the province in past years, including the one we paid tribute to earlier today, who was a great Attorney General in this province—and Attorney General McMurtry and Attorney General Wishart and so on—somehow always managed to position themselves, because they saw it was an important part of their office, in a slightly different position from all of the other cabinet ministers in terms of how they did things: how they moved legislation through here, how they actually listened to and respected that desire to have multi-party co-operation on the issues that related to the legal and justice system and human rights and how they actually respected the need for community consensus, in terms of having that before you could proceed forward with something as important as quasi-constitutional human rights legislation.

I will say, putting the best possible light I can on it in this instance, that it is unfortunate that the Attorney General has allowed the Premier's office to stomp on that tradition too—whether it's in the questions and answers we've had in this House, whether it's how the amendments have been treated and dealt with—and, most particularly, how so many members of the public, hundreds of people representing thousands of people who have the biggest and most profound concerns about this legislation and about their rights going forward, have been stomped on, have been shut out, have been told to shut up. They've been told their views don't matter; there's no time to listen to them.

I will put the best interpretation possible on it by saying that that is a construction of the Premier's office, which has forced this Attorney General to abandon the time-honoured manner in which that office is conducted in this Legislature and as part of the government of Ontario. The only disappointment I have is that the Attorney General hasn't stood up and said, "I object to this abandoning of that tradition," which I think is an important one that speaks to the effectiveness of the Office of the Attorney General and the role it plays.

I have a short time available to me, but of course we have the bad tradition that is being followed through on. I'm not going to give a lot of comments about closure or

time allocation and so on. People are fond of saying that it was done 103 or 603 times. What does it matter? We're talking here today about this piece of legislation. We're talking, as the leader of the New Democratic Party said, about the fact that Mr. McGuinty—the Premier—said in the election campaign, "I will be different." He said he would bring change to Queen's Park. All that has happened since he got here as Premier is that Queen's Park has changed him. The man who said he was going to come down here and stand up for the right to have this kind of open discussion, to listen and take the time to listen, to respect people and what they had to say, especially on matters as fundamental as human rights, has certainly changed, because we're seeing absolutely none of that now.

Instead, what we have is the adoption by this government of the bad tradition, which is that you pass a piece of legislation now and ask questions later: "Don't worry. Everybody's going to a lawyer. There's no need to worry about that." "Okay. How much is the budget?" "We don't know that." "Where is the clinic, and who's going to run it?" "We don't know the answer to that question either." "How about putting a guarantee into the bill, as the member for Whitby-Ajax and others did? As the Attorney General himself said, 'Fine. People should be guaranteed that their case will be dealt with in a year.'" "No, no, we can't have that. We're voting that down." There were all kinds of amendments of that kind.

1730

By the way, I should say that I don't apologize for one second for anybody, or on anybody's behalf, including our own party, for the fact that a backlog existed. That's not acceptable, but there was never any opportunity given to people to come in here and say how you might properly have funded the current system to make it work better, how you might have developed some other system that wasn't developed by this government in the dark recesses of their own little corners without any input. There just wasn't. They said, "Look, this is the way we're doing it. If you don't like it, lump it. We're going to jam it down your throats." The very fact that it's a bad tradition that they've adopted, which is to take steps, pass legislation and ask questions and answer them later, I think is inexcusable. That's the way it has always been done and that's why people have no faith in this place. Good traditions are gone, bad traditions are picked up by this government—very unfortunate when it's a matter as fundamental as this.

Mr. Kormos: I'm not pleased at all to be speaking to this bill on third reading under these circumstances and in these conditions: but two hours permitted by this government in their McGuinty muzzle motion for third reading debate on one of the most substantive, and at the same time incredibly flawed, bills that this government has put forward. The government promised score after score of individuals and organizations that wanted to speak to this legislation that they would have their chance to speak to it. The government published over \$100,000 worth of advertising, that continued to appear after it shut down

the committees, telling people they had under December 15 to apply to appear before committees that would meet throughout the winter months, when this Parliament was in the course of its winter break and when legislators had all sorts of time on their hands to listen to those people.

The government, in the course of promoting its agenda around Bill 107, either in its own right or through its spokespeople, defamed, libelled and slandered people working in the Ontario Human Rights Commission, those front-line workers and their managers and, inherently, the commissioners. The government members of the legislative committee promised that those front-line workers would have a chance to appear before the committee to respond to some of the incredibly scurrilous—and, I say to you, we would have discovered in no small part mythical—stories being told about them, and so-called delays, delays that are undeniable. We've been raising this in the Legislature over the course of the last decade and change; of course we have. An understaffed, under-resourced commission is not going to work very efficiently or very effectively. And a gutted commission, a commission that's been abandoned, a commission that's been locked and padlocked and simply left to rot with no staff and resources and no legislative structure, is going to be even less effective.

"Debate is not a sin, a mistake, an error or something to be put up with in Parliament. Debate is the essence of Parliament." Stanley Knowles said that in our federal Parliament in 1968. It was as valid then as it was 20 years earlier, and it's as valid today as it was then. What is government afraid of? This government broke some very significant promises to a huge number of people in this province in its flight from the debate on this legislation, its flight from the debate, its refusal to hear from people who have something very important to say about not just the legislation but about the principles involved, the fact that this is the privatization of human rights enforcement in the province of Ontario. Just as we prosecute criminal code offences, crimes, publicly, and we investigate them publicly with our police forces and prosecute them at the crown attorney's offices, and the style of the action is the Queen versus whomever, if I in turn want to sue the thief who stole the radio from my car, I can go to Small Claims Court or Superior Court, and the style will be Kormos versus thief. They're two very different concepts, two very different approaches with two very different rationales. One is for the individual to get individual redress and the other is to address the broader issue and the public concern around crime, and the development and assurance of safe communities.

You see, it's not called the individual rights code, it's called the Human Rights Code. Individuals who are complainants are but that, and that's a good thing. You can't talk about an individual complaint without talking about systemic concerns, because if there weren't systemic concerns, there wouldn't be individual complaints. Discrimination doesn't happen in a vacuum. It doesn't happen one on one. It's not a binary thing. Discrimination is a societal thing that lives in a structure, that feeds on attitudes, misbeliefs and certain perverse values.

It's not about the relationship between me and another person; it's about the fact that discrimination can thrive, the fact that we have to address it, expose it, confront it and eliminate it, and you don't do that by privatizing the human rights system here in the province.

Let's talk about some of the amendments that the government brought forward. The government insists that the commission is going to focus its attention on systemic discrimination, but of course there will be no investigative capacity on the part of the individual complainant. Just like people don't tend to commit crimes in full view of others, people don't tend to discriminate while scribes are recording and documenting the evidence. Discrimination, as so many victims know, can be so insidiously and sometimes politely subtle, yet have as significant an impact as the literal slap in the face, the literal blow to the body.

Let's look at what this government in its wisdom proposes for investigative powers on the part of a commission. I recall in committee—because I made notes on the government amendments that I had read; I'd be reading around 7:30, 8 o'clock in the morning, and Mrs. Elliott was there—I had written, "Stupid, stupid, stupid," on this particular amendment.

Let's look at what the government proposes for search warrant powers on the part of the commission conducting an inquiry. The commission may go to a place, knock, knock, knock on the door and in writing request the production of a particular document if it's conducting an investigation into discrimination and it believes that that document is relevant. The party is not compelled to turn over the document. It is only after the commission—knock, knock, knock—attends at the place and in writing requests a copy of that document that the commission, if it's denied that document, can go to a justice of the peace and obtain a search warrant. Oh, please. Why don't we start telling our police, "You can go down to the outlaw biker club. You have to go there first and request their drugs. It's only when you go there and request them, identifying yourselves as police officers, and they say 'Sorry, I don't think so,' and slam the door in your face that you can go to a justice of a peace and get a search warrant"? That's what the government's amendments were to Bill 107 in terms of the investigative powers of the commission. That's what the commission has to do before it can get a search warrant. Have you people never heard of paper shredders? This is 2006, for Pete's sake. People who discriminate—corporate entities that discriminate, employers that discriminate—sure as hell aren't going to keep the evidence sitting around for a commission investigator to go running after, after they've attempted to knock: "I want those employment records that we believe will demonstrate continuing discrimination against a particular applicant. And if you don't give them to us, we're going to come back with a search warrant." Do you really think they're going to be there when you get back?

1740

Even more insulting, you give the tribunal the authority to appoint an investigator, but you don't even give

that investigator the capacity or the opportunity to obtain a search warrant. The investigator on behalf of the tribunal is entirely at the mercy of the volitional participation by the subject of an investigation in providing evidence of their discrimination against a person or persons. Regardless of where you stand on the issue of privatization of human rights enforcement or retaining that very important public role, that's just bad legislation, and it is, with all due respect, Speaker, as I noted a week ago at 8 in the morning in my office, stupid, stupid, stupid.

I know that the Attorney General has somehow expressed nothing but disdain for process. I for one think that process is important. That's why we have principles like due process that are so thoroughly embedded in our sense of fairness in the application of law. Understand that the tribunal makes its own rules, that the tribunal can make rules in contravention of the Statutory Powers Procedure Act. Understand that there isn't a single section of the Statutory Powers Procedure Act that the tribunal has to comply with if the tribunal so chooses. This isn't the result of regulation passed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. It's not the result, even, of an edict by the Attorney General, never mind law passed in this Legislature. It's about the tribunal being able to override one of the most fundamental pieces of codified natural justice, amongst other things, that's ever been—the Statutory Powers Procedure Act was a turning point in the development of law, of administrative and tribunal law here in the province of Ontario. This is a cornerstone of the assurance of justice in these contexts.

Take a look at 37.1, yet again an amendment to Bill 107. This is scary, scary, scary stuff. This should even cause the advocates for Bill 107 to stop and think again:

"The tribunal shall dispose of applications made under this part by adopting the procedures and practices provided for in its rules or otherwise available to the tribunal which, in its opinion, offer the best opportunity for a fair, just and expeditious resolution...."

It doesn't even require that the standard they meet be one set by a third party—rules that "in its opinion, offer the best opportunity for a fair, just and expeditious resolution...." Reading the amendments that the government passed, notwithstanding concerns and objections, Mrs. Elliott and I learned that there doesn't even have to be a hearing in person, there doesn't even have to be evidence given orally, there doesn't even have to be evidence given by sworn statement. The tribunal has the power to choose that it will determine a claim on the basis of unsworn statements. That's what the bill says. Those are the government's studied amendments to this legislation? I indicated in committee that if I had voted for any of those, I would have felt compelled to report myself to the law society. I'm serious. If I had voted for any of those amendments, I would have reported myself to the law society. I would have insisted that they discipline me in one way or another.

I've told you about how the tribunal's search powers in the course of its investigations don't provide for search warrants at all. The tribunal is invited to enter the fray by

performing in an inquisitorial manner. It can conduct an examination in chief or cross examination of witnesses. "The rules may be of general or particular application." You know what that means? It's subsection 39(4). The tribunal can create rules that are "one of," that are tailored for any given case. In other words, you don't know what the rules are going to be when you embark on your complaint or, as a respondent, when you embark on your defence, if you will, to the allegations made against you. This is oh, so unattractively Soviet in its character and nature. People are being hauled into or are calling upon someone else to enter into a litigation process when they won't even be assured that there's any forenotice of the rules that will be applied. This is the sort of stuff that drove Kafka to brilliance, because the rules can change literally not just day by day, but hour by hour, never mind case by case. How do we then develop a body of, as lawyers would call it, jurisprudence around this stuff?

How do we avoid—because, don't forget, we're talking about the privatization of the system. We're talking about discriminators, people who abuse other people's human rights, being able to, well, settle the case—even, should the tribunal deem it expedient, expeditious, to settle a case with a nondisclosure clause. We know how notorious those have become in terms of the debate around them and whether or not they serve any valid public interest.

Is this an invitation? Is this a wide-open door for rich Human Rights Code violators, for wealthy ones, be they employers, be they landlords, what have you, to violate human rights helter-skelter as long as they can pick off, buy off, pay out—so-called "compensate"—victims of discrimination one at a time, one after the other? I say to you it is, and it's very dangerous turf for us to embark upon. It is the antithesis of what the model and structure has been from its very beginning. It is the absolute antithesis. It is not only not in the public interest; if it's not in the public interest, it can't be in the individual interest either. It doesn't serve our ultimate goal, which has to be to design a human rights enforcement system that has as its final, ultimate goal the eradication of human rights abuses, of discrimination, of violations of this code here in our province and beyond.

This is serious stuff. We witness escalating levels and rates and frequencies of discrimination in any number of areas. I tell you, Ontarians with disabilities who counted upon this government to maintain the Human Rights Commission, as it promised, when they supported this government's Ontarians with Disabilities Act are not just shocked and horrified; they're afraid, because an ODA without an effective commission is nothing more than literally mere paper, like this. That's it; nothing more than that.

1750

Tell me, friends, how this indicates on the part of this government any sincere commitment to fighting racism. The government buries an anti-racism secretariat in the skeleton, in the shell of the commission it maintains: no independent minister, be he or she with or without portfolio; no independent budget. Indeed, on behalf of con-

cerned people, Ms. Elliott and I moved amendment after amendment that would have given the anti-racism secretariat its own budget and a capacity to function in its own right, hopefully with the specialization and expertise developed by virtue of being an anti-racism secretariat, to deal with racism in every facet, including the prosecution of racist discrimination. The government has defeated that amendment. It did the same with the disabilities secretariat. The government defeated that amendment. Make note that there's no appeal on these decisions as a result of this government's bill.

The government's spokespeople were rather dismissive of those courts that had acted as appellate courts in the current regime, in the current system. I say that the government was being less than forthright, because there's a litany of cases cited where the courts of this province and this country have taken good tribunal decisions and given them the strength of law.

This government says it's going to shorten the waiting time. Well, by eliminating the section 34 function, this government is going to expand the waiting time. This government will create a two-tier system of human rights enforcement for those with the money, those with the pocketbooks, those with bank accounts, those with the Mercedes-Benz S600s. Oh, isn't that ironic? They will be able to buy their way to the front of the line with high-priced lawyers.

A support system? What, like the Office of the Worker Adviser, Mr. Attorney General, who have their own waiting list of two and two and a half years before you can even get an appointment because your government won't fund them? Like legal aid clinics that have had to limit the scope of their practice because you won't fund them? Like legal aid certificate programs where women who are victims of violence in their homes and whose lives are at risk because of that domestic violence can't get family lawyers to represent them on a legal aid certificate because you capped the number of hours, and a competent lawyer knows he or she can't perform the job that has to be done for those women with that limited number of hours? Is that what you have in mind?

People on this side of this chamber care just far too much about the future of human rights enforcement in this province to permit you to simply say, "Oh, we're tired of the debate." "We're bored," the Attorney General says. "We're bored; we've heard it all before." Yet in fact, if it weren't for the Brückmann evidence, the evidence of Elisabeth Brückmann given on November 22, 2006, we would not have been advised of the outright fraud that was perpetrated on committee members by presenters who purported to act for human rights complainants but who were revealed to be so far removed from human rights advocacy activity in this province as to merely, on a good day, imagine themselves in that role.

New Democrats don't support this legislation. It's wrong, it's bad, it's unhealthy—

The Acting Speaker: Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 21, 2006, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Bryant has moved third reading of Bill 107, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

I wish to inform the House that I have received a deferral notice from the representative of the government whip:

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on the motion by Minister Bryant for the third reading of Bill 107, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code, be deferred until tomorrow at the time of deferred votes."

It being close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until later on this evening at 6:45 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1756.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. James K. Bartleman

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown

Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Waterloo–Wellington	First Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Premier Vice-Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Finances
Balkissoon, Bas (L)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services (Community Safety) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels (Sécurité communautaire)
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L)	Sudbury	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (L)	London West / London-Ouest	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Deputy government whip / whip adjoint du gouvernement
Bisson, Gilles (ND)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Chief New Democratic Party whip / whip en chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Bountrogianni, Hon. / L'hon. Marie (L)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L)	St. Catharines	Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, government House leader / ministre du Tourisme, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (L)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Brown, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (L)	Algoma–Manitoulin	Speaker / Président
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Tourism / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Tourisme
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	St. Paul's	Attorney General / procureur général
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, deputy government House leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L)	Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	Deputy opposition whip / whip adjoint de l'opposition
Colle, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiles et de l'Immigration
Craiton, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services (Correctional and Emergency Services) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels (Services correctionnels et situations d'urgence)
Crozier, Bruce (L)	Essex	Deputy Speaker, Chair of the committee of the whole House / Vice-Président, Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Delaney, Bob (L)	Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for seniors / adjoint parlementaire au ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West–Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest–Mississauga	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Government Services / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Di Cocco, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (L)	Sarnia–Lambton	Minister of Culture / ministre de la Culture
DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L)	Hastings–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Municipal Affairs) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement (Affaires municipales)
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L)	Windsor–St. Clair	Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Ajax	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Oakville	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de l'Énergie
Fonseca, Peter (L)	Mississauga East / Mississauga-Est	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Gravelle, Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Hamilton East / Hamilton-Est	
Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham–Kent Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Erie–Lincoln	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and minister responsible for democratic renewal / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales et ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Klees, Frank (PC)	Oak Ridges	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldeep (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and to the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce et au ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Environnement
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	Chief government whip / whip en chef du gouvernement
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
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Marsales, Judy (L)	Hamilton West / Hamilton-Ouest	
Martel, Shelley (ND)	Nickel Belt	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Deborah (L)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services and minister responsible for women's issues / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires et ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines

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McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
McMeekin, Ted (L)	Ancaster–Dundas– Flamborough–Aldershot	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Éducation
McNeely, Phil (L)	Ottawa–Orléans	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Transports
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	Chief opposition whip / whip en chef de l'opposition
Milloy, John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron–Bruce	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / adjointe parlementaire au ministre du Renouveau de l'infrastructure publique
Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)	Stoney Creek	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Culture and minister responsible for francophone affairs / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de la Culture et ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Munro, Julia (PC)	York North / York-Nord	
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	Deputy opposition whip / whip adjoint de l'opposition
Oraziotti, David (L)	Sault Ste. Marie	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources and minister responsible for aboriginal affairs / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Richesses naturelles et ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Parsons, Ernie (L)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services (Disabilities) / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires (Personnes handicapées)
Patten, Richard (L)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Premier / adjoint parlementaire au premier ministre
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Peterson, Tim (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches–East York / Beaches–York-Est	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Racco, Mario G. (L)	Thornhill	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Travail
Ramal, Khalil (L)	London–Fanshawe	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (Rural Affairs) / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales (Affaires rurales)

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (L)	Guelph–Wellington	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de l'Éducation
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Victoria–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / York-Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Housing) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement (Logement)
Smith, Monique M. (L)	Nipissing	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjointe parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice- premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (L)	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Lanark–Carleton	
Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Tascona, Joseph N. (PC)	Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford	Second Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tory, John (PC)	Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey	Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition
Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (Agriculture and Food) / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales (Agriculture et Alimentation)
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Wilkinson, John (L)	Perth–Middlesex	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Research and Innovation / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Deputy opposition House leader / leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General / adjoint parlementaire au procureur général
Vacant	Burlington	
Vacant	Markham	
Vacant	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	

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Ces listes figurent dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et du premier lundi de chaque mois. Par contre, une liste des circonscriptions paraît si l'espace est disponible.

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of Debates
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(Hansard)****Monday 4 December 2006****Lundi 4 décembre 2006**Speaker
Honourable Michael A. BrownClerk
Claude L. DesRosiersPrésident
L'honorable Michael A. BrownGreffier
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 4 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 4 décembre 2006

The House met at 1845.

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to seek unanimous consent to move a motion respecting the consideration of concurrences and the interim supply motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): The deputy government House leader has asked for unanimous consent. Is there unanimous consent? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I thank my colleagues for unanimous consent.

I move that, notwithstanding any standing order, the orders for concurrence in supply for the Ministries of Education; Community and Social Services; Finance; Health and Long-Term Care; Health Promotion; Intergovernmental Affairs; Environment; Children and Youth Services; Energy; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Training, Colleges and Universities; Public Infrastructure Renewal and government notice of motion number 258 be called concurrently; and

That when such orders are called, they shall be considered concurrently in a single debate; and

That the time available to 9:20 p.m. this evening shall be divided equally amongst the recognized parties; and

That at the conclusion of the debate, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the orders for concurrence in supply for each of the ministries named above and to dispose of government notice of motion number 258; and

That if a recorded vote is requested by five members, all division bells shall be stacked and there shall a single 10-minute division bell.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Caplan has moved that notwithstanding any order, the orders of concurrence in supply for the Ministries of Education; Community and Social Services—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker: Dispense? Dispensed.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

INTERIM SUPPLY

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Speaker, while we're in such a jovial mood, I think I'll move the motion.

I move concurrence in supply of the following ministries: Education; Community and Social Services; Finance; Health and Long-Term Care; Health Promotion; Intergovernmental Affairs; Environment; Children and Youth Services; Energy; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Training, Colleges and Universities; and Public Infrastructure Renewal.

I move that the Minister of Finance be authorized to pay the salaries of civil servants and other necessary payments pending the voting of supply for the period commencing January 1, 2007, and ending June 30, 2007.

Payments for the period from January 1, 2007, to March 2007, to be charged to the proper appropriation following the voting of supply for the 2006-07 fiscal year, and payments for the period from April 1, 2007, to June 30, 2007, to be charged to the proper appropriation following the voting of supply for the 2007-08 fiscal year.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): The Clerk has brought to my attention that you said "March 2007." You need to specify the date, "March 31."

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Of course, March 31. My apologies.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the following ministries: Education; Community and Social Services; Finance; Health and Long-Term Care; Health Promotion; Intergovernmental Affairs; Environment; Children and Youth Services; Energy; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Training, Colleges and Universities; and Public Infrastructure Renewal;

That the Minister of Finance be authorized to pay the salaries of civil servants and other necessary payments pending—

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Dispense.

The Acting Speaker: If you're in your seat, I'll listen.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): Dispense.

The Acting Speaker: Dispense? Shall it carry? Carried.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Well, it's not carried.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry, it's agreed. Dispense is agreed.

Debate? The Minister of Finance not being here, the deputy government House leader.

1850

Hon. Mr. Caplan: It's actually always an interesting time to be able to speak to this, the concurrence in supply motion for the government. What it does is it authorizes the Minister of Finance to make the kind of payments that are brought down in the budget—I must say, a very well-received budget this past March when Minister Sorbara introduced the document here in the House. Speaker, there were some elements in it—because I note for your interest that the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, which I certainly have the pleasure to lead, has brought in some incredible work that is transforming and rebuilding this wonderful province of ours.

Back in 2005, we introduced a budget which outlined a \$30-billion infrastructure investment plan. I had a chance during estimates committee to chat with the members of the committee about specific details of that plan: over 100 hospital projects, rebuilding projects, additions, renovations—I would have to say, in the period of time, perhaps one of the single largest investments in health care modernization this province has ever seen; over 3,000 individual school projects in each and every riding represented by 103 members in this chamber, making a difference to teachers who are teaching, but more importantly, to students who are learning, providing better places to learn, better spaces to learn, a better learning environment, and those much-overdue kinds of investments.

But it didn't just stop there. I had the great pleasure, with my colleague the Minister of Northern Development, to outline a northern highway strategy: the completion of four-laning of Highway 11, all the way up to North Bay; four-laning of Highway 69, from Parry Sound up to Sudbury. That kind of building program is literally unprecedented—\$1.8 billion in that northern highway strategy. But it didn't just stop there: an additional \$3.4 billion to support southern Ontario highways for safety upgrades, lane expansion, new highways being constructed—the scope and the breadth. We had seen tremendous road-building in the post-war period, in the 1950s and 1960s. This program, long overdue, rivals even that very ambitious and, I would say, very well-delivered program of previous governments.

But so much more: the justice sector, rural Ontario, the environment, funding for water and waste water systems so that we can ensure that we have safe and clean water. This ReNew Ontario plan, as I said, is a \$30-billion investment in the foundation, in the fundamentals of our province, so that we could build. It's not about the bricks and mortar; it's what in fact we deliver inside, so that we deliver better health care so that our doctors and nurses can deliver shorter wait times for critical procedures, be they hips and knees, cardiac or cataract or MRIs; so that our education system can have lower class sizes so teachers can begin, as they have not been able to for a great long time, to address the individual needs of students who show up in their classes.

I have two boys, 10 and six years old. I want you to know that as a parent I know that having that kind of class size, having the attention of a teacher and the personnel within that school to be able to deliver high-quality education programs, those are the kinds of investments that I appreciate as a parent, but as an Ontarian, I appreciate even more, because when you do the necessary work up front, when you provide the supports, that's when you allow children to realize their potential and be able to contribute in an incredibly meaningful way throughout their lives, whatever kind of career they would choose to go into well into the future. Those are the kinds of things that ReNew Ontario supports.

It supports moving goods and people around our region. I would be remiss if I didn't indicate that my colleague Dwight Duncan, the finance minister, brought forward a Move Ontario plan: incredible support for public transit, some \$858 million, but in addition over \$400 million for roads and bridges, for much-needed repairs and work right across the province of Ontario.

I had an opportunity during estimates committee to outline some of these kinds of investments, long overdue, as I say, that are making a real and a meaningful difference for Ontarians, for our long-term economic prosperity, but indeed to heighten and support a quality of life that will make us second to none. There is so much more to talk about, certainly in the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, let alone the various government ministries.

I see my colleague the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. I don't know if he is going to share tonight as part of this debate, but a part of some of those earlier budget plans was something called the Reaching Higher plan: a \$6.2-billion investment, the greatest investment in the post-secondary sector in well over—40 years?

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): Absolutely.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Forty years, my colleague the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities says—most welcome, providing not only financial support, but grants for the first time in well over 15 years to students so that they can have access to post-secondary education; setting up new medical school programs, graduate school expansion. I can tell you, we are really seeing the kind of investment in our people which is going to put Ontario on a competitive track so that we can not only compete with our sister provinces but with any jurisdiction in the world. That is what supply and concurrence is all about: making the necessary investments, creating the necessary opportunities that a government, indeed our society, will benefit from in the short, in the medium and of course over the much longer term.

I note that so many of my colleagues, I am sure, will want to share in tonight's debate. I am delighted to talk about the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal. I did have seven and a half hours at the estimates committee to talk about the many initiatives, but I am very eager to hear from my colleagues, to hear about the priorities they

see in their ridings, to hear about the stories from around the province of Ontario and about many of the great things that Premier McGuinty has led us toward, because I must tell you that what you are seeing now is the fruition of a great deal of work. It's a bold plan, a bold vision, and something which has been a great pleasure for me and I know for my colleagues in government to participate in.

Speaker, I want to thank you very kindly for the attention that you have paid tonight, and I want to encourage all of the members of this House to support this motion.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

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Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my pleasure to join in the debate this evening on supply and concurrences. That allows me to speak on just about anything I want to speak about having to do with government programs, and I wish to use the time I have to highlight how the government is out of touch, particularly in the area that I am critic for. We'll see how much time I do have, but I wanted to highlight a few specific examples in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka of how the Ministry of Natural Resources is out of touch with what the people really want to see happening. I've got a couple of glaring examples of that, and certainly the priorities of this government seem to be a little mixed up.

We have the conservation officers that, I hear from around the province anecdotally, are not being properly funded, don't have enough gas in their trucks and aren't being properly equipped to do their jobs, to deal with conservation issues, to catch poachers in hunting season and year-round, that sort of thing.

What are the priorities in the Ministry of Natural Resources? I'm just learning in the last week or so about the fact that they've targeted the Aspen Wildlife Sanctuary, which is located in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. They've gone in there—this sanctuary has been around for many years, over 20 years. Audrey Tournay is the key person who started it. They've been doing all kinds of great work. What does the MNR do? It goes in and basically causes some animals that have been cared for to be euthanized, to be killed. That's the priority of the MNR.

I have to get on the record some of the response I'm getting from constituents in the riding of Parry Sound to this action. People are very much concerned about it. I'm not going to read who they are, but I'll read some samples of e-mails I've received just in the last couple of days on this issue. Here's one:

"Dear Mr. Miller

"We have just read the article in the Weekender regarding the euthanasia of five animals at the Aspen Wildlife Sanctuary.

"We are absolutely appalled, especially as we have worked with the sanctuary and know the wonderful work they do.

"How can we stop this?

"Who is responsible?"

Well, the McGuinty government and the Ministry of Natural Resources are responsible.

Another one:

"A short note to say that my daughter and I have both volunteered at the sanctuary over the years. The chance to work with the top-notch people in the sanctuary has been a great learning experience. It is amazing to see folks that really care about ... animals can run a facility efficiently, and on a shoestring budget.

"Perhaps, government types could take some notes from these gentle, caring folks. Destroying animals to meet some edict in an MNR policy should be reconsidered. Perhaps some of these wise decision-makers should make a visit to the sanctuary to see the fantastic work that Audrey Tournay, Tony and his staff do from morning to night, seven days a week."

Another one:

"We cannot believe what we have been reading in the paper about this subject. It is an outrage. We have personally supported the sanctuary for many years and observed up close how many wild animals have been helped and taken care of.

"Who and what is the 'enhanced wildlife rehab program' anyway, that allows slaughter of innocent creatures without any accounting to anybody, it seems. It must be devastating to Audrey Tournay to see her life's work destroyed.

"We would greatly appreciate clarification."

I know my mother has personally supported the Aspen Wildlife Sanctuary as well.

Another letter:

"I was very disturbed by the story covered in the local paper regarding the Aspen Wildlife Sanctuary. I have visited it in the capacity of my job since 1983. I have observed many people both young and old come there to view animals from the wild, that were in need of care and rehab. I don't understand how the provincial government can order the murder of some of these animals. (I use murder because that is what it is, not euthanasia which is a politically correct term when one wants to kill something.) No research was done to my knowledge by anyone from the MNR. This is after all a sanctuary, which means that animals from the wild, who are injured (sometimes by humans) can come and heal, and hopefully return to the wild, which I might add many have. If they can't return to the wild, they are given sanctuary. Hence the term....

"Right now, I am just really bothered by the fact that some civil servant (who has a piece of paper from some college or university) can dictate what is to happen to these animals. The animals that I have seen there are in very good hands. In my job, I have access to many places at the sanctuary, that are not open to the public....

"Please, please Mr. Miller, have the MNR stop this foolish action, and get them to concentrate on more serious matters, which I might add, they are failing to do, such as poaching. I'm sure the MNR could spend money and man-hours better than this. I thank you for your time."

That's very well said.

"We totally disagree with the MNR's decision to euthanize any animal at the sanctuary just because it cannot reasonably be returned to its natural habitat because of its condition. We understand that the sanctuary has successfully rehabilitated many animals from poor health and while they are unable to assume their natural place in the wilds, the sanctuary has been able to give them a home in an environment very close to their natural habitat. To destroy a wild creature just because it is unable to assume its natural place in the environment seems criminal to us. If the same criteria was applied to humans we would require a lot more cemeteries than we now have!!"

"The Aspen Wildlife Sanctuary has been asked to euthanize five animals because they are injured in such a way that they are unable to be rehabilitated.

"As such Audrey Tournay and her staff have decided to allow the animals to live the rest of their lives out within the protection of the sanctuary.

"This is a huge tragedy as often it is humans or human activity that ends up debilitating the animal in the first place!"

I've got many, many e-mails on this issue.

"Please be advised that the Ministry of Natural Resources should be severely castigated for their recent incursion at the Aspen wildlife centre which is located in your constituency.

"Audrey Tournay has devoted her life and virtually all her personal resources to the care and treatment of injured animals. When you offer aid to an animal that is in distress you have no idea if they will achieve a full recovery or if they will be able to be returned to the wild. You hope for the best."

"Please, please do your utmost to halt the madness of the Ministry of Natural Resources' bureaucratic nonsense in singling out the Aspen ... refuge for injured animals for cruel and unusual punishment.

"I cannot imagine the horror the staff of the centre collectively felt when the animals they were trying to heal and protect were killed. Would we be callously taking the same steps with humans? I think not."

I've got many, many more.

I understand that there are five animals that have been euthanized and there are more on the hit list: a coyote, two striped skunks, two raccoons, a common raven and a white-tailed deer. The Ministry of Natural Resources did require, I think, two raccoons, two great blue herons and an owl to be euthanized, and I ask, what purpose is being served by that?

You can see the support that this wildlife sanctuary has. As well, they do good work, in collaboration with the Trillium district school board and the Near North District School Board, going around and educating students on the value of stewardship, of looking after their natural environment, yet the Ministry of Natural Resources has seen fit to make it their business to euthanize these animals. I say there's a lot of other work they should be doing that they aren't doing. The government should realign their priorities, and I hope they will do so.

Another example in my area of the same Ministry of Natural Resources going against the wishes of the local people, once again getting a lot of people in my riding quite upset: The Ministry of Natural Resources has decided that they want to shut down public access to the Port Sydney dam, which has been used as a public trail over the Muskoka River for over 100 years. They're going through an EA process. They had a public meeting a week ago Saturday in the Port Sydney community hall, and they sure heard from the general public. Now I hope they're listening, because the room—I don't know how many it would hold—was filled to capacity, overflowing, and virtually everyone there was against public access to this dam being cut off. The Ministry of Natural Resources says it's a work and safety issue; that this is a problem when their workers are there putting in the logs, particularly in wintertime. I say that the public has been using that dam for over 100 years, and that has to be maintained. We can find ways to maintain that public access and maintain safety for the MNR people who are there doing work on the dam.

I attended the public meeting for the first hour, until I had to go to another function. The people there were overwhelmingly in support of maintaining public access. The first guy with a question asked everyone, "Who here is from Port Sydney?" I don't know how many people were in the room, maybe 300 to 400, however many fit in that room. Everyone put up their hands that they were from Port Sydney. Then he asked, "Who here wants to maintain public access?" and every hand went up. If the government is listening, then they will maintain public access.

I only have a few more minutes to speak, but I wanted to get on the record some of the responses I'm getting. I have too many to get all of them on the record, but here are some of them, just to give you an idea.

"I am writing to add my voice to the chorus of others urging you to keep the dam that connects the Port Sydney community open to the public. Our property overlooks the dam and we are well aware of the hundreds of people who use that dam as a bridge throughout the year and particularly in the summer. It is a key part of the community's identity.

"I understand that concerns have been raised about the safety of the bridge. I am not aware of any casualties that have occurred on it. If the MNR is concerned about the safety of their workers as they drop and raise logs (and I have no idea why they would be), they could rope off the bridge while they do that."

There were many constructive suggestions at the public meeting.

I have another one here. This was after the meeting, obviously: "Gentlemen ... the people have spoken ... please listen!!!"

"I am writing this letter to express my concern with the attempt by the ministry to close the Port Sydney dam to pedestrian traffic.

"For the past five years my family along with a group of six other families have been regularly vacationing in this area.

"We have used the dam as a bridge to get to the town of Port Sydney almost daily while on holidays.

"We walk to the town for ice cream, the newspaper, to go to the beach, or just for exercise....

"My family which includes young children has not at any time felt the crossing of the dam was dangerous or perilous. Whereas walking along the side of the road with cars speeding by is certainly nerve-racking with children."

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Another one: "Please find attached the comments and questions that I include on the comment form which I was given at the public open house."

They make some good points: "I frequently walk across the Port Sydney dam as a part of my fitness routine. In my 36 years as a full-time resident of the village, I have yet to see the dam being serviced.

"The danger that is perceived for workers and pedestrians obviously occurs only in winter. A more substantial fence ... other than the wire/vinyl that is there now, as well as the posting of potential fines for those who access the dam when workers are present could eliminate whatever danger which might exist for workers. A high chain-link fence along the edges of the present walkway would eliminate the danger...." What I think is being suggested here is that there are solutions.

"If you think that Port Sydney people will allow an historic location to be destroyed, apparently for the sake of MNR's fear of litigation, you are wrong. Just look at how the citizens united" in other cases, and it goes on.

I don't have time to read all these letters. Here's one other short one: "I have been a summer resident of Port Sydney for 80 years. I do enjoy my walk 'around' the dam. It is part of the charm of the village. Please do not close the bridge/walkway in Port Sydney."

There are other members who would like to speak this evening. I have a long list of points I'd like to make, but I would just wrap up by saying there are these two issues in my riding, and it's obvious that the government is out of touch with the people of the area. I hope they will listen in both these cases to the people who are speaking loud and clearly. And I've gotten some of their concerns on the record this evening.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: If you'd indulge me, I'd like to introduce Mr. Kirk Wrinn, who comes from Mr. Brownell's riding. He was one of our hosts downstairs for the Advocis society of financial planners. He's one of the greatest financial planners in the world. Kirk Wrinn, ladies and gentlemen.

The Acting Speaker: That's not a point of order, but it was a very good advertisement. Welcome.

Further debate?

Mr. Tabuns: I appreciate this opportunity to address the House on the question of supply. As you're well aware, this evening we're talking about the request from

the government for permission from the Legislature to spend money so that the operations of government can continue. It's an opportunity for us, as legislators, to give an assessment of the government's performance, the reality of whether or not they are spending money wisely and whether or not we believe that they show the managerial competence and the commitment that's needed to actually run this province. It's my observation in my brief time here in this House that in fact this government is not a particularly good manager, that this is a government that confuses spending money with results. Frankly, where it can't spend money, it will rely on puffery to look as though there's actual activity going on.

I want to touch on three areas in the time that's available to me. The first is the OPA, Ontario Power Authority, and its investments in energy efficiency; secondly, public infrastructure renewal and the transportation crisis in the greater Golden Horseshoe; and lastly, public infrastructure renewal and the whole issue of climate change. These are substantial issues, ones that this government should be paying attention to, taking action on, and ones where I believe their inadequacies are quite apparent and quite glaring.

In the spring of this year, the federal Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development reported on the climate change efforts of the federal government. I cite the comments of that commissioner because I think that what she found with regard to the federal government is applicable to the behaviour of this government in terms of its response to the electricity crisis and is consistent with this government's lack of action on climate change.

After 18 months of study, she came back with a number of simple conclusions, foremost amongst them that Canada was not on track to meet its Kyoto obligations. This was after \$6 billion in funding had been announced since 1997. Over that time, greenhouse gas emissions in Canada had risen by 27%. What the commissioner found was that even the basic tools required to determine whether progress had been made, even basic tools to determine if the investments had been wise, were missing, were absent.

Much has been said about this government's activities with regard to climate change. There is no climate change plan to date. Commitments that were made to address the issue of climate change, for the government to be able to say it was addressing climate change around coal phase-out—all broken. Interestingly though, this government continues to claim that it is reducing electrical demand in the province. In fact, the recent report of the chief conservation officer working for the Ontario Power Authority claimed 950 megawatts in reductions since 2004. However, that claim is not backed up by two of the most significant electricity-related bodies in this province.

When you go to Ontario Power Generation's most recent quarterly report and you look at their assessment of demand and what's impacting their operations, the OPA and the conservation strategy don't even register on

the radar. They are not factors. OPG President Jim Hankinson said, "The more moderate weather this year reduced the need for power for air conditioning in the summer." He also said, "The decline in activity in some sectors of the economy also held down the overall demand for power." Not a word, not a whisper about the claims of the Ontario Power Authority to have reduced demand by almost 1,000 megawatts in this province.

The IESO, the Independent Electricity System Operator, released a report on October 2. They talked about power demand and they had this to say: "Despite the record peak demand set this summer, reduced energy-intensive industrial load has led to lower energy demand in 2006 and throughout the forecast."

In other words, any claim to have had substantial impact on electrical demand in this province through the efforts of this government doesn't register with the two most significant agencies responsible for either making sure electricity gets to homes or generating that electricity in the first place. Those efforts were not consequential to those bodies. That says something significant. Because when you claim that you are having a big impact on electrical demand and yet your efforts are not noticeable, then we, as legislators, have to ask whether those efforts were of any consequence, which is why I hearken back to the federal government, the federal Liberals, and their complete failure, their inability to take action on climate change, something that many of us noticed for years, only recently validated by the environmental commissioner.

This past summer power demand spiked in Ontario, but in Toronto power demand dropped. Toronto has actually—

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): Who funded those programs?

Mr. Tabuns: Interestingly, I was just heckled by the Minister of Energy. Those programs were funded by Toronto Hydro, which had to go to the OEB to get permission for \$40 million worth of spending. May I go on?

The release from Toronto Hydro reads, "On August 1st a number of heat wave and electricity consumption records were broken in Ontario. Here in Toronto, we were able to actually reduce our electricity peak demand below the record level of 5,005 megawatts set a year ago. We have more summer days ahead of us and more records may fall, but so far Torontonians are proving that conservation and demand management does work and is an important part of Ontario's electricity supply strategy."

"What is remarkable about this is that Toronto accounts for approximately 20% of the electricity used in Ontario. While the rest of the province increased its use by approximately 4% or 845 megawatts last Tuesday, we managed to reduce our peak by five megawatts. And this is a very conservative estimate! Considering normal load growth, and 'heat island' effects in the city during heat waves, we could reasonably expect an increase in inner-city temperatures that would drive electricity consumption higher in Toronto than in surrounding regions."

The fact that we reduced our peak compared to last year's record is a sign that conservation and demand management are working in Toronto.

The reality is that Toronto Hydro and the city of Toronto have been leaders, and the province of Ontario has been lagging behind, has been claiming forward motion that is not detectable by other agencies of that government.

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In November, Premier McGuinty made another announcement about energy efficiency programs. He announced on November 3 that three separate programs would be rolled out next summer, including one where hydro companies offer cash rebates for old beer fridges. This was not an announcement that was greeted with joy and enthusiasm on the part of the environmental community. Keith Stewart from the World Wildlife Fund said that rules and standards for appliances and electronics could go a lot further. He said that this was not the kind of program that was going to make him jump up and down for joy.

The energy minister was asked by reporters what specifically would be the impact of these investments and these programs. How would we be able to tell whether or not the investments achieved their target? How would we know if in fact these efforts were of consequence? His response to questions about specific figures on how many megawatts the programs would save came in an answer of "substantial." There were not real numbers given. This is a government that sees spending as equivalent to solving a problem. This is not a government that looks for a target, decides on how to get there and follows through. It's a government that likes to make spending announcements, but not really a government that likes to deliver.

I want to go on to public infrastructure renewal and the gridlock and transportation crisis in the greater Golden Horseshoe. It's been projected and generally accepted that current growth trends in the greater Golden Horseshoe will increase travel time by over 40% over the next 25 years. That's a disturbing thought. If you travel around the GTA, if you travel to Hamilton, you know that people spend a lot of time in gridlock, in traffic, sitting there waiting for cars to move. You know that this is becoming a prime political problem in the areas around Toronto. It's becoming a larger and larger political problem within Toronto itself. People are profoundly frustrated by the shape of the urban regions they live in. They're profoundly frustrated by the impact that the lack of action on transit and transportation is having.

Beyond those matters of inconvenience, beyond those matters of increased cost for business operations, which are measured in the billions, there's the question of our severe smog problem. There's no question we have a smog problem. People know that. They have difficulty breathing on the worst days in the summer. They know that the exhaust from cars and other vehicles is having an impact. They want action on this. When you ask the government about its plans, they will talk very grandly about how it is taking action. But in fact, when you actually

press the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal on their goals to deal with these problems, there are none. There's no way to determine whether the spending that is planned is going to have any impact.

On November 14, in estimates, I repeatedly asked the minister what his target was for control of travel times. If a 40% increase was bad, was he going to spend money with a goal of having a 20% increase in travel times or a 10% increase in travel times? Perhaps his goal was to stabilize so that we wouldn't have an increase in travel times, so that we wouldn't have an increase in frustration. He did say that the investment in transit infrastructure was breathtaking, and maybe it will be. But at no point could he say that he had given instructions to his staff to, "Put together a plan, look at the costs and give me an outline of what it will cost to stabilize travel times so the gridlock and the congestion in the greater Golden Horseshoe don't get worse."

So what I have to say to people who are concerned about this issue is that it seems pretty clear that money's going to be spent. It seems very clear to me that studies are going to be carried out. But no one—apparently not the minister, apparently not his staff—has any sense at the end of the day what those investments and that change in regulations will mean for actual travel times and the creation of smog in the greater Golden Horseshoe. Or they have one and they're not telling legislators or the public.

That, I think, is central to the problem we have with this government. They will speak at length about their spending plans, but it's like pulling teeth to ask for the ultimate impact of those plans, such as they are.

When you look at the plans for containing growth for the greater Golden Horseshoe, you come across a study done by the Neptis Foundation, which looked at the growth plan put forward by the minister. They actually think there's a lot of good stuff here, but as written—and here are their words—"The growth plan, as it now stands, seems unlikely to achieve its own objectives." What they're saying is that business as usual, which the government is holding out as bad news, is most likely what's going to come to be. Even with all this flurry, even with all these plans, we will get business as usual: a 40% increase in travel times over the next 25 years.

Interestingly, they go on to say, "Given the momentum of current growth patterns and the volume of conventional greenfield development that is already approved, only very bold action will noticeably alter the future of the region."

So not only will the plan fail in its own terms, but unless there's a significant departure from that plan, that business-as-usual projection of a lot of people spending a lot of time sitting in their cars, wishing they were home, is going to come true. Get ready to sit in your car for a lot more hours and get ready to breathe a lot more smog. That's the outcome of a lack of planning, a lack of direction, and a lack of leadership and will on the part of this government.

I want to talk as well about climate change and the failure of this government to take on this issue. The David Suzuki Foundation has said before that this government has no climate change plan. Interestingly, although a number of times I've asked the Minister of the Environment, "Where's the climate change plan? What's your direction? What are your goals?" I'm always assured that things are being taken care of, that it's in hand, that they're clear about where they're going. Even in the last month or month and a half, the minister has convened a group of people for consultations on putting together a climate change plan. I tend to think that indicates that one didn't exist beforehand.

During the estimates, I asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal about consideration for climate change spending in his public infrastructure renewal plans, because again, when you talk to the Minister of the Environment, she says, "All the ministries are addressing this matter. All the ministries have responsibility." What people out there may not know is that this government is talking about an investment in the range of \$30 billion over the next five years, \$100 billion over the next 20 years—big bucks. Yet when you ask the minister, "You're spending this much money. You're going to shape investment and infrastructure in this province for decades to come. Do you incorporate climate change planning into those spending plans?" the answer is no. You ask, you press, but you don't get any plan, any measurement, any target. When I ask, "Do you have a role?" I'm told "Yes. We have some very ambitious plans." So I ask, "Tell us, in reductions in megatonnes of greenhouse gases," which is the standard for determining whether you're actually having an impact, "what's going to happen from the \$30 billion or \$100 billion you're going to invest? No answer; not even calculation in those categories. You can't measure if you don't even start setting the framework within which to measure. So you have to ask why a government that says it has a commitment to this issue doesn't even think about it in any systematic, targeted way when it plans to spend \$30 billion to \$100 billion.

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Interestingly, when the Environmental Commissioner came out with his report, *Neglecting Our Obligations*, looking at exactly how this government has performed in the environmental field, he talked about adaptation to climate change. I'm going to read what he has to say, because I think it's consequential.

He says Ontario has not yet developed a formal strategy to deal with adaptation to climate change, an approach now considered essential for ensuring that the province's ecosystems and built environments such as bridges, dams, sewage treatment plants or drainage systems will be able to withstand the effects of climate change. Projections are that the change in climate will bring more unpredictable weather, including intense rain and ice storms, heat waves and droughts, lower water levels in the Great Lakes and increased costs for cooling

buildings, along with threats to the health or even survival of local plant and animal species.

I think that's a fairly straightforward statement by the Environmental Commissioner. It's a big issue. If you look around the world, increasingly jurisdictions are beginning to take adaptation into account. When they make multi-billion dollar investments, they think about it. The World Bank has issued guidelines for its development projects. This is an issue that governments around the world are starting to come to grips with, except, apparently, here. Because when you ask, "Do you factor in the changing climate to the new roads, bridges, dams, hospitals and schools?" no, it's not there. So you have to say you have a government that, when it comes to the larger environmental questions, is rudderless, that passes on opportunities to actually deal with these questions, these issues, in the course of its normal spending, and that, as the Environmental Commissioner says, has no coherent plan. When it comes to environmental issues and spending in areas that have an impact on the environment, this government is derelict; it has left its duties behind.

We have to vote for this motion. We don't want the wheels of government to stop. But the simple reality is that no one should have any confidence that the money is being spent wisely.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge—maybe not in that order.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The order is fine. I think it's the order of the ridings in population, if I'm not mistaken. At least that's the way mine works, Pickering having the greatest degree of population in the riding, and then Ajax and subsequently Uxbridge. It really just depends on where I am in the riding as to what order they're in. Certainly in Uxbridge it's Uxbridge-Pickering-Ajax, or Uxbridge-Ajax-Pickering. It seems to suit the purpose for a whole variety of reasons.

I'm pleased tonight to be able to enter into this discussion and debate on the motion for interim supply. I think probably one of the best parts about a motion of this nature, among other things, apart from the material aspects, is that it gives the members a fairly wide-ranging opportunity to explore a number of issues and matters they may or may not otherwise have the opportunity to do, as members will rise on a point of order to call them back to a bill at hand. It's probably a little easier on the Speaker as well, because the Speaker doesn't have to worry quite as much about whether they're on topic because of the nature of the motion covering so many ministerial areas and functions.

I must say Mr. Tabuns spoke fairly extensively on the motion itself and the implications therein—not that I necessarily agreed with everything he said by any means, but nonetheless, he spoke more extensively to the motion than might otherwise be the case.

Nonetheless, it remains an important motion in the business of the Legislature. It's an important opportunity,

obviously, for the legislators to ensure that we fulfill the authority to implement government programs, that we fulfill the commitments and put the visions the government has into practice and to ensure that the wheels of government continue to turn when we may not be here formally for a period of time. We have to make sure that bills are paid and that our partners in the province, whether it's a transfer partner, which I'll speak about in a bit, as well, or structures that have been set up to support them financially, actually see that happen during times when we're not here. It's one that supersedes other motions for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, without it, no government would be able to undertake the mandate with which it was entrusted by the constituents in the province.

The current spending authority—and the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal spoke to this—ends at the end of this year, December 31, I believe. This particular supply motion will ensure that we can continue doing the business of the province, the financial business primarily, during the next six months until the end of June of next year, which takes us over the end of our fiscal year, the end of March. As a result, when the debate is completed and the vote is taken, and on the premise that the Legislature and a majority supports the motion, we will continue to be able to make the payments that we need to make beyond January 1, 2007, and for the six months that follow that.

Without the spending authority so desperately required for the business, we would be unable to make most of our scheduled, and even some unscheduled, payments that might occur. As an example—I mean, it wouldn't happen—nursing homes wouldn't get the transfers that they need, whether it's municipal or private sector or non-profit, to be able to run the business of our long-term-care homes. Our hospital partners, through their boards of directors, wouldn't have the financial resources that they need to carry on their work on a day-to-day basis; the doctors we visit on a daily basis, as the case might be, wouldn't be able to submit their bills for payment effectively. Municipalities, as an example, wouldn't be able to get their gas tax money now that we are at the full two cents a litre for gas tax being transferred to municipalities for the purposes of public transit—they wouldn't have those resources available as they plan their next budget year and their transit initiatives. Those who are on social services, who desperately need the support of the province, would not be in the position to receive that through our either single-tier or upper-tier municipalities who principally have the responsibility for that service level. School boards certainly, as well, without those transfer payments, wouldn't be able to function: teachers wouldn't get paid; custodians wouldn't get paid; supplies wouldn't be purchased; the heat wouldn't get turned on during the winter; and even, in a few cases, probably the air conditioning might not get turned on in the summer, although there are not too many schools that I'm aware of that are very heavily air-conditioned at this point.

In other words, without the motion, our government would be unable to fulfill the mandate that we're respon-

sible for, for the people across this great province of Ontario. Since we came to office some three years ago, the province has been in a period of time where they've benefited from sustained economic growth. Growth is no accident; it just doesn't happen coincidentally. It needs a variety of factors working for it—locally, provincially, nationally and internationally—but it certainly is dependent, at least in part, on the strategies that a government puts in place for its province.

In this case, we firmly believe that some of our economic success during this period of time is as a result of a plan that is rooted in future economic growth. We firmly believe that as we go forward, we'll continue to see economic growth as a result of some of the strategic planning that's been taking place during the past three years. It's certainly a plan to build a stronger Ontario on the strength of the people of the province of Ontario, not on their backs, but on their skills and on their knowledge and by investing in their health, whether it's direct investments in capital infrastructure for hospitals—I know in my own riding, my own community. Actually, it's a shared facility, primarily with the member for Whitby–Ajax; the hospital sits in her riding. We're anxious to see a shovel in the ground next spring so that with the long-awaited hospital expansion at the Ajax-Pickering site, the Rouge Valley system will see its much-needed expansion. Clearly our capacity to ensure that funds flow will be important to them as they finish their planning during the course of this coming spring. I know the member from Whitby–Ajax will be equally as anxious as I am to see that facility take place and I hope that we'll be able to be there at the same time next summer or early fall, as the case might be, turning sod. Maybe we'll get on a shovel. Some have suggested that if for some reason we can't turn sod, I'll arrange for a steam shovel to arrive regardless. It might not be yellow—some have suggested yellow—it could be red. Nonetheless, we'll get a steam shovel on site and dig our own hole—whatever it takes to make things happen there. That's indicative, I think, of what needs to happen as part of the economic growth and ensuring the health of our community as part of that.

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We need to have an educated population, an educated workforce, and we have to remain very competitive. That's to ensure that the province is successful, not only that we are successful as a community for the next year or two or five, but that we set in place the types of strategies that will ensure economic growth and prosperity for a decade or more.

I ask those here to cast their minds back to 2003. Where did we find ourselves some three years ago? In my view, our public education system was faltering at best, was failing our students at its worst. I can recall prior to that a former minister speaking about creating a crisis in education. Clearly it seemed to be an objective at that point in time to do that for a particular government's reasons. We're in a far different place today than we were then. We have stable relationships with our edu-

cators. It's indicative of the work they're doing in the classroom, and that's what we need to ensure. The supply motion provides a capacity to maintain that particular stability in the long-term contractual arrangements we have established with the staff in the schools in the province of Ontario.

The health care system was anything but healthy at that point. Hospitals weren't being built and opened. In effect, hospitals had been and continued to be closed in the province of Ontario in an effort to rationalize the system. Unfortunately, that rationalization was not to the benefit of patients or to our communities at large.

Public transit had been orphaned. The province had for all practical means discontinued its support for public transit and the municipalities were facing an even greater burden to maintain the existing level of service, let alone being able to make much-needed improvements or take any bold steps in respect to public transit, moving people from their cars on to efficient systems, being able to generate the volume of transit users that make it viable outside of places like the city of Toronto. In many jurisdictions, it's tough to keep the systems going with the lower ridership as you try to attract new riders and try to build the system so that not only can you move people from their vehicles but you can also entice people who don't have vehicles to use it more efficiently and effectively. And give them clear choices: give seniors, students and those who don't necessarily travel long distances to work the opportunity to use systems in their own communities. Public transit had been an orphan and clearly the investments in public transit over the past three years have changed that dramatically. Certainly the establishment of the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority and its new chair, the former mayor of Burlington, Rob MacIsaac, is going to make a tremendous difference in that during the coming period of time.

We've made and committed serious investment in post-secondary education and thus we need to ensure that the monies will flow to fulfill those obligations on an on-going basis. I can tell you that in Durham region—not in my riding particularly but certainly shared throughout the region—the University of Ontario Institute of Technology was desperately in need of stabilized funding, although they had initial funding. It came from the former government. Jim Flaherty and Janet Ecker were both great champions of that facility, as were the other members from Durham region, Mr. Ouellette and Mr. O'Toole. There was great start-up funding. Unfortunately, as we took over government, all of the pieces hadn't been put in place at that point to allow the facility to continue to grow and feel comfortable in those early tough stages. We've stabilized some of that funding. Mr. Bentley was out there recently, and he'll talk in a moment about some of that, but he certainly has been a champion of the facility, as was the former minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Minister Chambers.

The provincial and municipal governments not long ago, in 2003, were at loggerheads. I came from the municipal sector. Some of the folks who are here either

have been there recently or came from that sector prior to that, and we were butting heads pretty hard. There was not much commonality between the sectors. We were finding ways to argue with each other, more so than ways to co-operate with each other, for a variety of reasons, not the least of which had to do with the downloading of costs onto municipalities and the need to have municipalities transfer those costs to the residential taxpayer, and the pushback that came from our taxpayers, and rightfully so. We had little choice but to fight with the provincial government of the day in an effort to ensure they got the message that we couldn't continue this process of downloading because of the cost on the residential tax base—in particular, to those who were on fixed incomes with increasing value in their homes through market value assessment but no increased resource on a day-to-day basis to actually pay the bills they were being asked for.

As a matter of fact, I think that on the municipal front the most notable accomplishment, if one can call it that—one that still stays in everybody's mind—was the mega-mergers that occurred, and the debate that was ongoing and continues to be ongoing in some contexts with respect to that.

We woke up in the fall of 2003 with a fiscal reality of a \$5.5-billion fiscal deficit. We had anticipated some of it, clearly. That debate has gone on that we knew, in spite of the fact that the books were supposed to be balanced, that they wouldn't be, but I don't think anybody at that point really anticipated the magnitude of the issue we would be facing.

Put simply, our mandate then, three years ago, was to build a better Ontario. It was kind of like pick-up sticks—you know, as if someone had taken the pick-up sticks and scattered them on the floor. Now it was time to rebuild by picking up a stick at a time and not shifting too many other pieces so that the whole game would be lost in the process.

Our school system today: We have more teachers, the class sizes are smaller, the test scores are higher, and the buildings, physically, are in better shape. We need these financial resources through our supply bill to be able to ensure that continues.

Primary health care, community care and long-term care are improving the health of Ontarians. Hospitals are actually being built. Shovels are going in the ground or the plans have moved well forward. We have primary health care teams approved. Many are now in operation; others are still ramping up. We've established a whole new structure around how communities will engage in health care through the structure of the LHINs, which are really beginning to take formal shape and action, and we are looking forward to all of that.

We're seeing today that hundreds of thousands of students are benefiting from the commitment to \$6.2 billion in post-secondary education. I mentioned UOIT, but I'll speak briefly about, in my own community and in that way the broader community, the level of confidence that's being shown in the community now, to a large

measure as a result of that long-term not only stable annual commitment, but growth-related commitment, because we need that.

Recently, there was an event that Minister Bentley had the opportunity to attend in which there was a \$1-million donation to the institute, that new facility. It's new. It's small in relative terms, but the E.P. Taylor family and Tribute Homes jointly made a \$1-million commitment to that facility. It was hosted, emceed, by Sandy Hawley, the renowned Canadian jockey, who is now also a spokesman for Tribute Homes.

The minister's attention to that matter, as well as support of members throughout Durham region on both sides of the House, I think, was important, and certainly will continue to be important. I think it's reflective of what's happening in other jurisdictions in the province, where the private sector and the community are leveraged for support when they see government being there at the table as well. It is very, very difficult to get community support and private sector support for initiatives in which the government is not seen to be at the table. I can tell you that from my municipal days as a member of our local hospital foundation. It's a struggle to get the kind of dollars you need on your 30% commitment at the time—it's changed now. We've changed the structure and the dollar value. But it's a struggle to get the community to get to those levels on projects of \$10 million, \$20 million, \$30 million and \$50 million in the absence of a clear indication that the province is actually going to be there, and the \$30-billion plan for capital investment signals to communities that we're going to be, that we have the capacity and that we're prepared to find the means to be at the table at a point where they're ready to go.

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We're making huge investments in public transit and part of this process will help to continue that, both in new public transit and in municipal roads and bridges. In last year's budget alone, as we came to the end of the budget year, we had some \$400 million we managed to provide to municipalities throughout the province in one-time funding, but available to them immediately. As they prepared and finalized their budgets, they were able to put that into action immediately to improve their basic infrastructure. In addition to things like COMRIF and other structured partnership programs, this was a one-time opportunity to not only do things in their communities but enhance the economic climate of their communities as well.

We have an energy plan beginning to unfold now that's speaking to the long-term energy needs of the province, as well as encouraging conservation. A modest amount of some of those dollars is going toward conservation initiatives and ensuring the conservation message is getting out there.

At the end of February or thereabouts, I'm going to have the opportunity to hold the third annual energy conservation forum in my community at the Pickering Town Centre. I've had the support and privilege of being able

to use their facility. It's nice. It's a captive audience that travels through the mall on a Saturday, so you don't have to really go looking for the audience. People are keen to learn anyway, but they don't have to make a special trip, in many cases, because they may be at the mall, in addition to those who come. I'm looking forward to the 30- or 40-odd conservation organizations—municipalities, private sector initiatives, our local utility, Ontario Power Generation, Hydro One—that will participate in that yet again for a third year. I think their ongoing participation is, to a large measure, reflective of our commitment to initiatives that are important to them in supporting their business models as well.

Today's provincial finances are managed with a high degree of transparency and a degree of prudence required by a democracy that works well. I've had the opportunity over the past three years to work directly in two ministries, first with Minister Phillips at Management Board, now government services, and, subsequent to that, with both Minister Sorbara and Minister Duncan at finance, and now Mr. Sorbara again. I've had the opportunity to see the breadth of the provincial enterprise, as it's referred to by the bureaucracy and others on occasion, which I may not have had the same opportunity to do working within a ministry or ministries. It gives me a great deal of pride to have worked in that environment, because I've seen not only the political activity and the debate and discussion that goes on over particular initiatives and the to and fro that happens with that, but I've also had a chance to see the incredible expertise and professionalism of the Ontario public service, not just here in the Legislature, with the assembly and the folks we work with, but across multiple ministries as they traipse through—and they traipse in numbers some days. The Ministry of Health may come in with a number of staff in support, in the event that there are questions and queries that need to be asked and responded to, to make sure the expertise is there. I've been tremendously impressed by their work, their professionalism and their ability to detach themselves from the politics, clearly understanding what their role is in delivering government policy and what our role is in the development of government policy.

I'll tell you quickly that when I first arrived at Queen's Park, after three or four months I was mildly frustrated. It was kind of like, "When are we going to do something? I'm a little tired of going to briefings. When do we actually move on with this initiative?" I think it was an ADM I was chatting with who said, "Look, we're ready to go on that particular initiative, but until we get clear direction from your government—from cabinet, from the minister—on that particular file, it is kind of on hold. It's slowed down a bit. It may be a great initiative, it may be one you want to continue with from the former government, or it may be one that you want to put on the shelf if you have some other agenda at this point in time." They were so very professional in the way they managed that process, understanding that they had an obligation to wait upon government, to brief and provide

all the information necessary to allow cabinet to make a determination on initiatives that they felt were important to move forward, and then move deliberately on those and not in any way try to undermine those for any particular reason because they have been wedded to an earlier policy directive. As I say, I've been impressed with ministry staff throughout the entire enterprise, as it's referred to, and the opportunity I've had to work with them.

I think that the plan we set out is working. I can see it in my constituency. I can see it as I visit schools and talk to educators. I can see it as I meet with members of our hospital board or hospital foundation or the hospital staff. I can see it at the university and college when I get the opportunity to visit there at events or speak with their presidents, as the case might be. I can see it when I talk to the friends and contacts I have within Ontario Power Generation, in particular, because of the role that I played there with the nuclear plant in Pickering. I can see it when I talk to my colleagues at Veridian Energy, the successor to our local utilities, forming a new utility, about the sixth- or seventh-largest in the province now. But I have, like you do, a chance to interact with people on a great variety of community initiatives. I can tell as I've talked to them, as I talk to business about has happened, as I talk to manufacturers or retailers, that we're clearly on the right track in a long-term initiative to ensure that this province is on track and remains on track for some considerable time to come.

It's not as though we're without challenges. Clearly, the challenges that we've been facing in the past while remain in front of us. Oil prices have come down somewhat, but they're still high relative to where they were, and we really can't be sure where they're heading at this point in time. The Canadian dollar remains strong, which is fine if you're travelling outside the country; not so great, though, if you're exporting. Interest rates, you will read on a daily basis, are either going up or going down, but they're a little higher than they were just a few years ago. Clearly, what's happening south of the border, reading the *Financial Post* today—and one only needs to look at the paper or the media—is that there is a weakness in the American economy that can, and likely will have, some impact on us, depending on our ability to stay above that fray.

We will do our part to ensure the economy withstands those external factors to the greatest extent that we can. Part of that is managing not only our own finances in a prudent fashion, but assisting those organizations and entities we are partnering with to ensure that they remain economically strong and viable and then can attract to our communities the type of investment that creates those other job initiatives we wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to see.

This is an important piece of legislation because it does allow us the capacity to continue our obligation to those who work here for the province of Ontario and our partners that we have a direct relationship with, and in setting the stage as well, for people to have confidence in

our ability to continue to manage the economy and manage the province.

I'm pleased to be able to stand tonight and speak to the motion. I could probably take the balance of the time, but I won't do that, because I know we have other members of our caucus who would also like the opportunity to express their views on this particular motion. With that, I will sit down.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): It's my pleasure tonight to join the debate with my colleagues on the motion for supply and concurrence. As my colleague mentioned earlier, this is a very important motion, obviously, that we're all going to have to pass because the order of business has to continue. It does give us an opportunity, though, to reflect on some of the issues that are important to our constituents but also on the areas that are of importance to the broader context of what happens here in Ontario.

It reminds me of just last Friday, when I was able to host at a little event in my riding, with the federal member of Parliament, as well as the school board trustees, all the new city councillors who were elected in the city of Ottawa to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Hon. Mr. Watson: Which ones did you endorse?

Ms. MacLeod: I had one of the people, Mr. Watson, whom you actually endorsed at my event, so it was wonderful. We got to talk about issues that were very important under the general category of growth, which included education and transportation issues, as well as health care issues. One of the big issues for myself and some of the councillors and school board trustees I'm working with in my constituency is a new public school, a secondary school in Nepean–Carleton, that's obviously very much needed because we've got such a fast-growing community, with the highest birth rate in all of Canada. Obviously our school board, the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board, has voted to authorize the final design phases for a grade 7 school in our community of Longfields and Davidson Heights. This is very important. We've got three feeder schools—the Adrienne Clarkson school, the Farley Mowat school and the Berrigan Public School, all elementary—that require about 1,200 classroom spots for children in south Nepean. Currently, these kids are being bused out of their zone. They require a school in their own community. The additional problem, of course, is that some of these kids have decided to leave the public system for either the private system or one of the other three school boards in the city of Ottawa.

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It is one of those things that the community has gotten behind. We're very pleased that the province of Ontario has finally lifted a three-year moratorium on school closings in order to make way for new educational facilities, and hopefully one will be this new school at Longfields and Davidson Heights.

We've been calling on the province and we've been working very hard with one another: school board trustees Alex Getty, Greg Laws, former trustee Norm MacDonald who has brought us the three former schools

I just mentioned, as well as city councillors Jan Harder and Steve Desroches. We were quite pleased two weeks ago when the famed Canadian author Farley Mowat, who's one of the namesakes of the feeder schools, decided to sign our petition and be the first person to sign it. Since then, we've got 11,081 signatures in just one week. We'll continue our petition-signing and I'll be continuing to bring it up in this Legislature right up until next Thursday when we rise for the holiday season. But it just goes to show you that in areas of this province—some of the areas, anyway—we've got such high growth that we have to look after not only our young, but also our elderly.

That brings me to my next point. One of the big issues that has come up in one of the aging populations in my community has been the shortage of long-term-care beds in the province and in particular within the city of Ottawa, where we're short about 850 beds. In the summer, I contacted the Premier via letter on August 15, first of all to indicate to him that Ontario needs to acknowledge and accept that there is a looming health care crisis in our city with respect to no new long-term-care facilities, affordable retirement homes, home care, recreational facilities and programs for our aging population. I mentioned to him at that time—and certainly today, we're reaching a critical level. Second, I've asked him to get involved, to put a plan forward that will begin to address the crisis in long-term-care facilities.

As I mentioned several times in this Legislature, 850 long-term-care beds are what we're waiting for in the city of Ottawa. Of those, about 130 patients are waiting in hospital beds. They're known as bed blockers. That's been creating a shortage for those who require immediate health care. There are about 590 additional people who were placed in facilities who are waiting for nursing home care.

In Ottawa, there are currently no new plans for any new nursing homes to reduce that shortage. The only replacement is the Madonna Nursing Home in Orléans, and of the 155 beds that are available, 75 are already spoken for by the current residents. In my view, the time to build new long-term-care facilities is now, not when the crisis hits. Of course, there would be some people in the Ottawa area who would argue that the crisis has already hit, because they're already waiting on long lists for long-term-care facilities, medical procedures, home care and other affordable retirement homes. That's one of the big issues in my constituency, along with the school.

In addition, when we're talking about long-term care, you also think about Bill 140. In the 2003 election, the McGuinty government made a commitment that they would provide \$6,000 in additional care and ensure an additional 20 minutes of care for every long-term-care resident. Unfortunately, with Bill 140, not only does it not address new beds, it doesn't address the \$6,000 and it doesn't address the 20 minutes of additional care. That's a bit of an issue that we have in the city and of course throughout the province.

Recently, as many people here know, I used to work at the city of Ottawa for a city councillor there, Jan Harder. She indicated to me that Bill 140 does not address the very needs of our most vulnerable long-term-care home residents. She adds, "It adds a burden of administrative compliance and documentation that will bleed dollars from front-line care without a significant increase in funding. For municipalities it represents another down-load of legislative requirements without the dollars to support them." That's a real concern to us in the city as we prepare to move forward.

I do want to congratulate the city of Ottawa for opening up some of its long-term-care beds at the Peter D. Clark long-term-care facility, as well as at the Carleton Lodge, which is in my home constituency of Nepean-Carleton.

These are some very important issues.

The other issue I've been able to raise in this Legislature is the issue of the long wait lists in the city of Ottawa with respect to what's happening with the acute care beds but also what's happening with cardiac treatment, pediatric treatment and so many other issues that we have been dealing with. We tend to be on the last of every list. We rank at the bottom of a growing number of health care wait time lists. The situation is getting worse and the provincial government doesn't seem to have a plan for dealing with the issue in our city. First we learned that our seniors have some of the highest wait times in the province when it comes to trying to find a long-term-care bed, then it was our children in Ottawa who have to wait longer than any other children in the province for pediatric surgery, and just last week we learned that we had the absolute worst wait times in Ontario for radiation treatments. That's obviously very disappointing.

We've also learned in the past that according to other published reports, waits for prostate cancer surgery and heart surgery are twice as long in Ottawa as in the rest of the province. Hip replacement waits are 154 days in Ottawa versus the provincial average of 99 days, and knee replacement waits are 194 days in Ottawa versus the provincial average of 146. So we're concerned that we're being either underfunded or we are clearly being terribly neglected.

Those are some of the issues on the health care front.

Another issue has come up in the last week. I and my colleague from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant, Toby Barrett, have brought up the very important issue of supply management. I wanted to talk about dairy farmers in my constituency of Nepean-Carleton. They are such hard-working people. When I've had an opportunity to work with other members at other levels of government, the farming community in my constituency of Nepean-Carleton has always been so welcoming, so kind. They are just hard-working, wonderful people, and they've contributed to our economy in such a meaningful way.

At a time today when agriculture seems to be under attack, Ontario's 5,282 dairy farmers continue to flourish. They produce almost 2.5 billion litres of milk each year.

They've added about 42,500 jobs to our community. They've generated farm cash receipts totalling \$1.6 billion.

They operate under something that's very important. If you go out canvassing in Nepean-Carleton, it doesn't matter what election—federal, provincial or municipal—the issue of supply management will come up from time to time. It's the foundation of our rural economy. Under supply management, consumers have guaranteed supplies of high-quality products at fair and stable prices and, in return, the farmers get stable incomes and receive a fair share of food prices. But the supply management sectors are nervous that ongoing trade negotiations might threaten this system.

That's why my entire caucus, including our leader, John Tory, has signed the FarmGate 5 petition, which I'd encourage members opposite, if they haven't already done so—I understand there are some 31 of the Liberals who haven't signed the FarmGate 5 petition—to sign it, because it is a fundamental thing that our farmers in the constituency of Nepean-Carleton absolutely require. At a time when they're going to be confronted with dealing with implementation of the Clean Water Act and other invasions of their private property and their land, it's important that we show them at least some sort of support. I think it would behoove members opposite to show that level of support to our rural community.

On a final note, I just wanted to talk briefly about an area that's of concern to me, and of course that is our children and our youth. As the critic for the official opposition, I was somewhat dismayed last week to learn from a leaked Auditor General's report that \$1 billion was not being spent appropriately for our children and our youth. I was quite disappointed by that because obviously our most valuable resources are our children and they, as we all know, are our future.

What was saddening and disappointing to me, and I think to several others across the province, was when we learned that several executives with children's aid societies were given vehicles, including two SUVs worth over \$50,000 apiece. I want to put this in perspective, because some sources who met with me from residential treatment centres indicated that \$50,000 would go a long way in the treatment of one troubled youth in a year. The cost would be about \$66,000 to treat a young child who is troubled. To know that we've essentially wasted over \$100,000 on these vehicles is quite troubling.

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We also learned last week that the Auditor General had uncovered some stunning evidence of improper spending, including the expensive vehicles I just mentioned, but also meals at high-end restaurants with no explanation and expensive trips to the Caribbean, China and Buenos Aires. I'm sure tomorrow, when the Auditor General finally releases his report, we'll see a little bit more and we'll understand; a lot of this will be put into perspective. Nonetheless, I think people in all political parties in this Legislature were quite dismayed to learn that some of our most vulnerable children were put in

harm's way in quite this way, with the misappropriation, if I may say so, of some of the funds.

The good news, of course, is finally the McGuinty government decided to—

Interjection.

Ms. MacLeod: Pardon me?

Finally, I'd just like to say that the Liberal government decided to make good on one of its promises. Usually they like to break them, and they like to talk over you when you mention the fact that they break their promises all the time. But they did introduce something that took them three years after they were elected and another 20 months after the second time they made the promise, which was to introduce an independent child advocate, something that is very intriguing. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the first person to introduce a child advocate in the province was Premier Davis, a Progressive Conservative, in 1984. It's gone a long way, and just to commend the minister for introducing it after such a long time after she had promised it.

In any event, we'll be making sure every step of the way in this political party that we are consulting with the people, studying the legislation and making sure we hold their feet to the fire so that children never again have to wake up in the morning and find out that \$100,000 was spent on vehicles and not on the treatment of children at high risk.

On that note, I just want to conclude. I certainly enjoyed the debate this evening and I'll be looking forward to hearing what all of my other colleagues have to say.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I very much appreciate the opportunity to stand and debate concurrence in supply today and follow up on a couple of topics that a number of our members have spoken about. I'll speak about a number of issues.

Recently, I just happened to sit in on a committee and we discussed a number of things that were very concerning. I certainly hope that the government is going to review and bring forward some strong amendments on the changes to the bereavement act and what takes place there. We heard from a number of groups and organizations on that committee and it was very concerning. It didn't quite answer the big-picture questions on how to deal with that. I hope that when we deal with that issue through the committee in the amendment process the impacts on all the communities in that area will be taken into consideration. As well, the title and mortgage fraud issue was very key and very important, as a lot of people have some strong concerns, and I agreed with the bar associations that were presenting that it shouldn't be an intent that homeowners would be obliged to purchase insurance in order to deal with this issue. I certainly hope that through the amendment process we can strengthen these things up quite strongly.

I'm going to comment on the member for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge. He just had to go and mention it, didn't he? He had to go and mention what concurrence in supply does and doesn't do, and it takes care of and pays those school boards. I'm sure, thanks to the member now,

that the kids on the hockey team—I coach kids' hockey—every one of those kids watching will be saying, "You mean if you didn't pay them we wouldn't have to go to school?" And the parents would be saying the exactly opposite: "You mean if you didn't pay them they wouldn't be going to school?" Yes, having the kids out—I coach a minor atom hockey team.

Interjection.

Mr. Ouellette: The kids are a lot of fun; the parents, sometimes, I don't know. Terry Kelly once gave me a book on coaching kids. He went into great detail and said you can always tell the first-born or the first one playing in the sport, because the expectations can never be achieved." Unfortunately, he's right. But the reality is that you've got to get out there and work on behalf of the kids. When the kids are out there, they're having a lot of fun, they're walking away with a smile on their face, and that's the most important thing.

Hopefully, when we bring a private member's bill forward, we'll get some support. I spoke with the Solicitor General and the Attorney General about it. There are some problems in there regarding individuals that the minister responsible for children and youth should look at, where there's not a criminal investigation report required for referees or empires and those areas. It just so happened that somebody brought to my attention that a multi-conviction sex offender was out refereeing six-, seven- and eight-year-old kids, and I have some strong concerns with that. So we're going to bring a bill forward, and hopefully we can get some support. I know the Solicitor General and the Attorney General were very supportive of that, and we'll look at that later.

We quickly sent out an e-mail to some of the kids. I want to make sure that we wish all the kids on the hockey team a Merry Christmas: the goalies, Spencer and Nick; all the defencemen, Nick, Quinn, Brad, Gaelan, Jordan, Charlie, Michael, Jake, Isaiah, David, Jack, Cole, Cody and Ian; and of course my son Garrett, and my other son Josh, who doesn't play on that team. The kids really enjoy seeing the opportunity.

I'm sure that a lot of the sitting members here and those who are on other business right now appreciate and enjoy being with the kids and having the opportunity to get in and talk with the schools. I got an e-mail tonight from Cole, who said, "Oh, my teacher's all excited because you can come and talk to the class." Well, that's one of the fun things that you do as an MPP, to get in and talk to the kids and give them a rundown of what happens in the Legislature. I know quite a few of them are watching tonight because I was going to mention their names, and I appreciate the opportunity.

But there are a lot of other things that we want to talk about. The member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge also mentioned the energy plan, which I have some strong concerns with. I met with the mining industry, and they have some very strong concerns with the price of natural gas, the projections for the costs, what's going to happen with natural gas and how it works as a potential replacement—potential replacements. When we were in

power, we had an all-party committee called the alternative fuels committee. I thought it was very productive. I see one minister of the current government who was on the committee, and she did a great job on the alternative fuels committee. It was very interesting to try and get some input of how we're going to deal with this energy issue throughout the entire province.

The mining industry's concerns were very similar to a number of other groups and organizations. As a matter of fact, this Friday I have another individual coming to my office to talk about wind power and about some of the opportunities there. The concern from the mining sector was the cost of natural gas. Even with the new pipelines coming down, the tar sands are going to occupy all the use of the gas coming down, and the expectation is that by the year 2015 the demand is going to far exceed the supply. So after that date, you're going to expect to see huge increases in natural gas costs, because you've got to project a long ways down the line. We're dealing with an energy plan. How are you going to deal with that, and what changes can you make now to accommodate for that? Part of it with the mining sector is that these individuals are dependent on machinery that utilizes natural gas to drive their machines. If they don't have that, then it's very cost-ineffective, and it's going to be difficult. They're looking for some sort of method of coming forward and dealing with that issue.

I know that both ministers are in the House tonight. While we had the opportunity to serve in the previous government, we established a committee that tried to address this issue. It went on and what it dealt with was the fact that potentially the Ministry of Natural Resources has control of about 2,400 to 2,600 dams in the province of Ontario. Now, these would be considered low-flow dams or low-potential generating opportunities. What we did was—quite frankly, it took me a couple of ministers from the Ministry of Energy side before I found one who found some interest in it—we established a joint committee to possibly review the opportunity to address and utilize that low flow. For anybody who drives on Highway 28, when you go by Lovesick Lake, you'll see all that water flowing through there on a regular basis. There must be a way to be able to harvest that and harness that energy on a regular basis so that it can add to the grid in a special way. Quite frankly, if the resources and the energy were put in at this time the way they were put in for other aspects in life for the high-producing dams, the Beck and those other dams that are dependent on minimum flows and a minimum height of 12 feet of water—I think the new low-flow generation would certainly be able to add substantial amounts to the grid. What you have to look at is that what we invest now will certainly spawn new investments and new development later on. Those 2,400 or 2,600 dams that the ministry has control over could produce anywhere from one to five megas for a significant number of them.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Are you saying I don't give a dam?

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Mr. Ouellette: Well, I'm not saying that, but I know that there are individuals within the ministry who might give you that perspective in a different sense. I'm speaking to the Minister of Natural Resources.

There is some huge potential there. In the riding of Oshawa, Camp Samac or the Winchester golf course, for golfers who may know the dam in the area, could potentially add one to five megas. Winchester might be able to bring in three or four megas and the other one or two megas. When you're dealing with hydro and the potential for development there, the peak time is in June, July and August; that's when those dams are flowing and utilizing the energy in the best way. That would certainly add to a lot of problems. Not only that, but a lot of the sites are potentially at end-of-line designations. The Minister of Energy would know that those are some of the key sites, because it's very hard to get all that transmission line to the end-of-line sites. If you can reduce the amount of energy going to those end-of-line sites, which are small communities in remote parts of the province, you would be able to significantly contribute back to the grid, because these low-flow dams are—guess what?—located at a lot of these end-of-line sites.

Great things are happening in Oshawa. It's the community and everything coming together. We're seeing the great contributions, the vision of the council there. I want to congratulate the new and re-elected members of council and also thank those who served and didn't come back this time around for their vision in things like revitalizing downtown Oshawa with the brand-new GMC arena. People don't realize what the positive impacts are of that new arena downtown. I happened to do an article on costs. When you're dealing with costs or operating costs, you look at what's happening in the community. I've been informed that the new arena has about 240 event nights throughout the year, and of those 240 you're looking at about 1,500 meals per night in downtown Oshawa. That's huge, the community coming together and revitalizing downtown Oshawa. Not only that, but we've got the new rinks at the Legends centre and the university, the south Oshawa recreation complex and the Connaught community centre and the new fire station.

A lot of great things continue to happen in our riding. We've got the new university and everything happening there with the new facilities. It's got new ice rinks. It's got the Ridgebacks; that's the name for their teams, their hockey team and that. Things are moving along quite nicely. It's adding benefits to the community, and it's growing in leaps and bounds. Not only that, but I want to congratulate Don Blight and Chuck Powers from the hospital foundation for a great event that was held, and all the volunteers and individuals down at the new GMC centre. They raised a huge amount of dollars for the new cancer centre and all the revitalization at the hospital. It's going very nicely. Things are happening. We've got the university, the cancer centre, the new hospital aspects that are coming on-line, the new arenas, the new fire station and the rehab centre. The Canadian Mental Health

Association just had a significant amount of funds for a new building, and the region should be thanked on that for their contributions. The region contributed a lot of chairs and desks and facilities within the Canadian Mental Health building there, and it helped out significantly in providing a work environment that's very friendly and very compassionate for the individuals.

For the recent municipal elections, Oshawa had a couple of questions on the ballot, and they supported one of my strong concerns. I introduced a private member's bill in the past to directly elect the regional chair, and apparently it was over 80% response in favour of directly electing the regional chair.

We've also got other things, such as Hillsdale reconstruction, all the new schools in the community as well, and things are happening quite nicely with the Stevenson Road interchange and of course the new children's aid building on Taunton Road. There seems to be some controversy over that, but providing services for kids is paramount for a lot of individuals. Of course we would be remiss if we didn't mention the new courthouse that's coming to downtown Oshawa and helping to revitalize the community.

A lot of great things are happening in our community. It's not a single entity that's making a difference; it's a community. That's why I say "community," because the community is bringing it all together and making those changes. We're very happy to be able to stand there and support the community and events like this and say thank you for the hard work they do, as well as look forward to working with them in the future, wherever possible, in any way we can.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak on the supply and concurrences. I will be seated and allow my other colleague to continue on.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): It's my pleasure to stand up for Cambridge, the heritage river community where the Speed and the Grand meet, and discuss the supply and concurrence motions before the House.

Residents of this great province have endured three long years of government mismanagement under the McGuinty government. This government has frivolously wasted millions of hard-earned tax dollars, monies that could have been spent to strengthen our health care industry or ease traffic gridlock, but this government chose to waste millions of dollars to grab headlines.

The McGuinty government spent \$2 million to tell residents of Ontario that they could now see a doctor. Today, since that ad ran, there are still 20,000 men, women and children in my riding of Cambridge without a family doctor. I would ask the Premier, where are these new doctors? I can tell you that they sure aren't in Cambridge or any of the other underserved areas in Ontario. A very long time ago, in 1997, I had Cambridge declared an underserved area, and we've been working hard to attract doctors. But it's become more and more difficult as time passes, and nothing is being done to address the problem. There are 1.2 million people in Ontario without a family doctor, and yet this government

has the audacity to say, "The doctor will now see you." That is a cruel joke. The ad is a slap in the face to the more than one million people without a family doctor.

This government seems to have a cloudy view of reality. Maybe the McGuinty government should spend less time and money advertising and more time investing in the needs of Ontario. I recently introduced a private member's bill that for the first time ever forces governments to address this crisis by establishing an absolute minimum of doctors required to service Ontario patients. The patient-to-doctor ratio bill forces governments to meet a target, for if they do not, all cabinet ministers would take a reduction in pay for that year. As the former catcher for the Dodger baseball team, Yogi Berra, once said, "You've got to be very careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there." That aptly describes the McGuinty government's lack of a plan and vision to solve the doctor shortage. They truly don't know where they're going. The time for talk is over. What we need is action now by the government. This is simply not an issue that the McGuinty government can turn its back on any longer.

This government spent \$6 million to drop one letter from an acronym. That is just plain wrong. The residents of Ontario work incredibly hard for their paycheques, and this government has no respect for how it spends Ontarians' tax money. Traffic gridlock has become almost unbearable, but this government continues to ignore the problem and worry about issues such as dropping the "C" from OLGC. I am not sure what it will take for this government to realize we have a traffic congestion problem in Ontario cities and towns.

It is not good enough to have a government that collects and wastes taxpayers' money. The people of Ontario deserve a government that is accountable to its taxpayers. They deserve a government that is transparent. They deserve a government that will address the issues that matter. What they do not deserve is a government that does not respect their hard-earned money and just squanders it all away, which is what they're getting from this government.

The McGuinty government will say anything to get re-elected. This government will tell the people of Ontario that wait times are down, even if that is not so. Ontarians are still waiting months and months to get an MRI. Actually, some Ontarians are so fed up with waiting to get an appointment that they are travelling to the United States, paying about \$400 and getting their MRI.

There is a huge problem when this government is telling everyone in Ontario that wait times are down, and yet Ontarians are so fed up with waiting, they're travelling out of province and out of country to receive proper health care. This government is more concerned with getting a front-page story than they are with governing.

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This government has broken more than 50 promises since 2003. It is disheartening to see a government with such neglect for what it promised to do. The people of

Ontario put their faith and trust in this government, and the McGuinty government has zero respect for that trust.

McGuinty's latest broken promise affects our seniors in long-term-care homes. This government committed to increase funding to seniors in long-term-care homes by \$6,000 per resident per year. Now, three years into this government's mandate, they have done nothing and plan to do nothing to keep this promise. These are our mothers and fathers and our grandparents in long-term-care homes, and they deserve the utmost respect. They are simply not getting that from this government. When you make a promise, you keep it. It is a sad state of affairs when this basic principle is ignored.

I have met recently with numerous administrators, staff, family members and residents of long-term-care homes, who are all deeply concerned with the Long-Term Care Homes Act as proposed. Their concerns are all valid. Long-term-care homes need more money for their residents, and the staff need more time with the residents. The Long-Term Care Home Act is void of both of these major concerns.

The McGuinty government has chosen to pay more to feed criminals in Ontario than to feed our seniors. In Ontario, provincial jail inmates receive approximately \$10 per day for a food allowance while long-term-care homes receive \$5.41 to supply three meals a day for seniors. The McGuinty government simply has the wrong priorities. The \$5.41 for three meals is less than a Big Mac meal for \$6.38 at McDonalds or a Whopper combo for \$6.03 at Burger King. That is shameful when our mothers and fathers in long-term-care homes receive less than three meals a day than one Big Mac meal at McDonalds.

Ms. MacLeod: That's if they're getting into a long-term-care home.

Mr. Martiniuk: Yes. The new Long-Term Care Homes Act imposes new requirements on long-term-care facilities but does not provide additional funds to carry out those additional requirements. This simply means that the money to implement the new requirements will have to be taken from other areas, such as the food allowance of \$5.41 per day per resident, and will obviously aggravate the present problem considerably.

I have been fighting for three long years with this government to get hospital expansion and upgrades needed for Cambridge Memorial Hospital. The expansion and upgrades were promised long ago but have yet to be carried through. I commend the hard work that the doctors, nurses and administrators do at our community hospital, but they can only do the best job with the available resources. The last promise made by the McGuinty government was that a shovel would be in the ground in the fall. Well, we are watching the winter approach, and still no shovel.

Last week, in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record, there was a story that ran with the headline, "Hospital Expansion Delayed Until Late Spring." It's typical of this government to just keep pushing back the start date. I actually had a doctor from the hospital ask me if all this

government does is make announcements and re-announcements. He said this government has made the same announcement three times, but do we ever actually see the money? That is what the people think of this government. The McGuinty government is simply based on announcements, not results.

We have an emergency room crisis in the province of Ontario and in the region of Waterloo. What is the McGuinty government doing about it? Ignoring the problem, just pretending it doesn't exist. Ontario should be a leader in health care, and right now, I am not seeing that. What I am seeing is a government that imposed a new health tax but is failing to invest in health care.

What Ontarians need and deserve is for the McGuinty government to stop mismanaging the taxpayers' money. What Ontarians need is for the McGuinty government to stop saying anything to get re-elected and to start showing some leadership. What Ontarians deserve is for the McGuinty government to stop breaking its promises.

Mr. Bisson: I want to put on the record a couple of issues as this particular concurrence in supply motion deals with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and education etc. I want to put on the record something that is becoming increasingly more and more of an issue in northeastern Ontario—my good friend, the Minister of Natural Resources, will understand this issue, representing a riding that represents mining—and that is the whole issue of common core.

I've been having calls, and I'm sure the member has been having the same calls, from a number of constituents who basically want to get into the mining industry. One of the issues is common core, which is the basic training people need to take if they want to work in the mining industry, be it underground or the mill environment or, as they call it, the plant environment. They have to undergo what's called common core in order to make sure that the workers are trained and identify the issues of safety and how to work properly within the mine so that it's done in a safe way. I think all of us in this House—I know all of us in this House—support that initiative in regard to making sure that all workers be trained in the systems of safety and understanding what is safe as far as the work that they do within a mining system.

It used to be at one time that common core was done and certified on site by the individual mine. In other words, if I got employed at, let's say, Kid Creek Mines or Macassa Gold or wherever it might be, that training was done directly at the mine, and there were people who were qualified to certify employees in the common core training. What has since happened over the years is that we've transferred that to the community college system, which in itself is not a bad thing, but the problem is that in order for people to be trained for the underground portion of common core, they need to go to Sudbury. For people living in Kirkland Lake or Timmins or, in this case, Kapuskasing, because of the Agrium mill or De Beers up in Attawapiskat, it is difficult to get people down to Sudbury in order to qualify for common core to work underground.

I think the government needs to take a look at how we're able to deal with making sure that yes, people do qualify under common core, but that it be done within their local communities from which they come is the first issue. Yes, there is some training that is done locally. For example, Northern College in Timmins provides some part of the common core training program in the city of Timmins, and that is a good thing, but they're not able to provide all of the certification needed for people to be able to work underground. As a result, if you're looking for work and you happen to get hired on by a contractor or by a mining operator to work in the mining industry, you need to qualify yourself for common core before they allow you to work in the mine itself. For many, that has become a huge issue. Number one, a lot of people don't have the ability to get to Sudbury to do the common core training for all kinds of reasons, one of the simple ones being if you're unemployed and you don't have money, how do you get to Sudbury in order to do the common core training? It's a very basic thing.

The second thing is that the cost is borne by the worker. Here's a scenario: I'm an unemployed worker who is trying to get a job in the mining industry where there is employment available today. I've got to pay for the entire cost of training of common core before I can even qualify to go underground. So I may, yes, get hired by a mining contractor or by a mining company, but I can't start there until I pay the money to go out and get trained. The problem is that most of these people are without the means to do it.

I've been receiving a number of calls in my constituency office, both in Timmins and in Kapuskasing, and I know Charlie Angus, my federal colleague, has also been getting them in Kirkland Lake, and I'm sure the Minister of Natural Resources is getting exactly the same thing in Kirkland Lake and across the area.

We need to do two things. We need to take a look at re-uploading the costs of common core. Common core should be borne, I would argue, by both the province and the employer and should not be a cost to individual workers trying to get work in the underground to qualify for common core. The second thing is, we need to take a look at how we're able to certify individual mining operators and contractors, to certify that these employees that they're hiring are able to qualify under common core.

So that's one of the recommendations I would make to the government, and I hope it is one they will listen to, because we all know that one of the only good news stories we have when it comes to the employment situation in northern Ontario is the mining sector: gold and precious metals specifically, and base metals. The prices are high, and in communities like Kirkland Lake, Timmins and other mining communities we're doing very well when it comes to the mining industry. There is a huge demand for workers in that particular industry, and one of the problems that I'm hearing about from both the employer community and the employees who are trying to find work—the unemployed—is that this whole issue of common core needs to be dealt with better.

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The second issue is that of training overall, both apprenticeship training and on-the-job training. One of the things that we need to do—and I believe that the community colleges have a huge role to play in this—is make sure that our community colleges are engaged with employers in the particular regions they serve to help them provide the type of training they need within the employer's community to make sure that we have the basis by which to qualify workers for the very technical trades that we have and the very technical work that we have to do within our industry. Far too often, specific training programs are not available to employers, and I'll give you another example.

In Mattice—actually, it's not in Mattice; it would be in Jogues. No, it's not in Jogues; it's actually in—oh, my God, is that ever bad, when you're trying to find the name of a community—anyway, just south of Hearst there is an operator who basically takes remand products out of the Columbia Forest Products mill in order to build and add value to that particular product that he makes. He takes, for example, MDF that may be grade B or grade C, cuts out the bad parts, uses the good parts to make shelving and various materials and resells it into the market at a premium. It's a good little value-added business. One of the difficulties he has—it's in Hallebourg—I just finally got around to where it is. It's in Hallebourg. How can I forget? My friends over there will get mad at me.

One of the issues, he tells me, is the same thing that I'm hearing from many employers across northern Ontario. He has to physically cover the cost of training for all the employees he takes into his work site. It's fairly technical work. You're talking about computerized equipment that operates at a fairly fast pace. People need to understand the programming and the logistics of how the computers work and how the machinery works. To train a worker to do that kind of work results in a fair amount of effort and cost on the part of the employer to make sure that they're able to train workers up to that level.

The problem is that these smaller employers in the value-added industry are having to cover the entire cost of training out of their own budgets, which adds costs for them to do business. But what is really galling is that once they've trained these people and they've shown that they're productive workers, that they're able to keep a job, that they're able to work their shifts and not miss time and perform the tasks that are required of them, a lot of them say, "Do you know what? I'm working here in this value-added plant at 12 or 14 bucks an hour. Now I'm going to apply at the big plant"—the sawmill, the paper mill or whatever it might be—"for a job at 22, 24, 25 bucks an hour," and you can't blame them.

The problem is that the employer who has the money and is able to train these people gets the benefit of the training from the smaller employers. So the smaller employers are paying to develop the workforce by providing the training. They basically act as springboards for the

major employers to pick them up, and then they're able to benefit from the training that was given by the smaller employers. That's everything from WHMIS to health and safety issues to the actual training of the workforce.

So I would propose that we need to take a look at training from a different perspective. Again, I believe that's something that the province should be doing. It is to our collective good as a province to make sure that we provide adequate training for employers to be able to develop the skills that they need within their workforce. I think the province is well suited, through its community college system and others, to be involved in a more direct way in assisting employers to develop and then to run training programs within their employ. It would seem to me that would be one way that we're able to provide support to our local businesses and to reduce their costs so that they're able to better compete in the marketplace when it comes to competing with other jurisdictions out there that may be in the same business.

I only note that in the value-added industry, countries such as Holland and Norway, and many others, do far better on the value-added side than we do. But you have to take a look at why a country like Holland, that has far fewer trees than Ontario, is a bigger player in the value-added industry. One of the reasons is, they've specifically developed strategies by which to get them there; that is, they provide the training supports that those industries need in order to provide the kinds of supports they need so that they can do what they've got to do at a cost that's affordable to the employer. They also have strategies by which they help to identify markets—and that's for another debate—and they provide not direct grants but also assist with loans and financing to assist those industries to operate, as well as looking at transportation as an overall issue.

I say to the government, training is a huge issue for the employer community and workers. We need to take a look at trying to undo some of damage that was done in the past when previous governments—in this case the Harris government—basically transferred the cost of training from employers in the province onto the individual. We now have a situation where apprentices in the electrical field, apprentices in the machinist field and others are having to pay. They're now working; they're in an apprenticeship training program. They used to be able to go off to trade school in the college system, and that was paid by the province. Now tuitions are paid by the individual, and far too often many people choose not to go to trade school because they cannot afford the tuition. We need to take a look at how we make education and the workplace more affordable for those people who are there.

I look forward to one day where this government either comes to its senses or a day when we take government as New Democrats to deal with these very important issues of training when it comes to supporting employees who are trying to get the training they need on the job, workers who are trying to get into the workplace and, yes, employers who are at the end, needing these

particular skills. We've got to get the province much more involved in the process of providing the type of training needed to get people back to work.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): I just want to take a moment and introduce two very special guests in the Legislature: my sister, Carole Matthews, and her son, Dillon Sambasivam.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? Is there any other member who wishes to debate?

Not seeing any, Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Education. Shall the motion pass? Carried.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Was there a no? I didn't hear it. I'm sorry. I'll do it again.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Education. Shall the motion pass?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry, I'm not hearing anything here. All right, then, I'll take him at his word. There is a no.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Finance, including supplementaries. Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health Promotion. Shall the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of the Environment. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Energy. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Caplan has moved that the Minister of Finance be authorized to pay the salaries of civil servants and other necessary payments pending the voting of supply for the period commencing January 1, 2007, and ending June 30, 2007. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Pardon? Excuse me, another paragraph below that. Please, if I could just have some silence. We're almost finished.

Payments for the period from January 1, 2007, to March 31, 2007, to be charged to the proper appropriation following the voting of supply for the 2006-07 fiscal year, and payments for the period from April 1, 2007, to June 30, 2007, to be charged to the proper appropriation following the voting of supply for the 2007-08 fiscal year. Filed on November 30, 2006. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 in the afternoon.

The House adjourned at 2052.

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 5 December 2006

Mardi 5 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 5 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 5 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

UKRAINIAN GENOCIDE

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I rise to commemorate the anniversary of the Ukrainian genocide of 1932, known as the Holodomor. This genocide was to be for Ukrainians what the Holocaust was for the Jews and the genocide of 1915 was for the Armenians: a tragedy of unfathomable proportions that traumatized the nation, leaving it with deep social, psychological, political and demographic scars that Ukraine bears to this day.

Stalin himself is reported to have said, "No one can deny that the total Ukrainian yield of grain in 1932 was larger than in 1931," and yet about 10 million Ukrainians died that year of a man-made famine as the Communist state made its failed attempt to crush the freedom-loving Ukrainian people.

On behalf of the leader of the official opposition, John Tory, and the entire PC caucus, I extend our sincere condolences to the Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko, whose own relatives were victims of that genocide. And I extend our deepest sympathies to the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and to the worldwide Ukrainian community on this tragic anniversary.

May the memory of the victims of the Holodomor be eternal. Slava Ukraini.

CORNWALL AND AREA ECONOMY

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): Around this time last year, I had the unfortunate duty of notifying this House of the closure of Domtar, the largest employer in the city of Cornwall in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh. At the time, there were fears about what that would mean for the city.

One year later, it gives me pleasure to tell you that Cornwall and all the communities of my riding have risen to face their challenges. While there is certainly more to do, excellent progress has been made.

This government has been a constant partner in this time of transition, offering assistance ranging from strategic investments and one-time grants to the forgiveness of Cornwall's downtown loan. The downtown loan for-

giveness has resulted in incredible dividends. Up to the present, a total of about \$1.3 million in financial assistance has been offered, through the Heart of the City community improvement plan to help with repairs and enhancements in the downtown areas of the city. That assistance has gone towards revitalization projects with a combined value of \$6.7 million; in other words, a net return of more than \$5 of private sector investment for every dollar of public assistance.

Recently, it was announced that Marimac Inc., a Cornwall producer of bedding and accessories, is expanding its operation in my riding to Iroquois, another sign that things are starting to happen in eastern Ontario.

The city of Cornwall and the united counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, with the full support of this government, are providing businesses with the tools they need to succeed and are reshaping communities in the process. I am looking forward to continuing to assist them.

TOBACCO INDUSTRY

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I encourage this McGuinty government to act quickly on a tobacco exit strategy, which they've been ignoring for far too long. Government interference has decimated the industry, and tobacco farmers can no longer produce a viable crop. Farmers are fed up with this government pointing its finger at the feds.

Recently, Ontario's ag minister said, "Ontario is prepared to be an active participant in a federally led process to fund a long-term solution for the tobacco-growing region."

Is Minister Dombrowsky meeting with Minister Strahl in Ottawa to discuss the 60-40 split? The question remains.

As I've told this House, there is an underground tobacco trade that deletes \$2.5 billion in taxes each and every year. This \$2.5-billion loss in taxes across Canada would go a very long way in tobacco country.

As the fight for a fair exit strategy continues, farmers in my riding are finding it increasingly difficult to hold their heads above water. Through no fault of their own, farm families have invested in infrastructure—infrastructure that is now worth very little.

In recent weeks, tobacco farmers have rallied outside not only federal but also provincial members' offices, and although I look forward to speaking with farmers this

Friday at my office, I'm disheartened that they have been reduced to nothing more than begging for action.

1340

FOODLAND ONTARIO RETAILER AWARDS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to congratulate Morello's Your Independent Grocer and owner David Morello for his 2006 Foodland Ontario Retailer Award.

Since 2000, Mr. Morello's grocery store in Peterborough has participated in the Foodland Ontario program, which works to increase public knowledge and consumption of produce grown in our province.

At this year's 19th annual Foodland Ontario Retailer Awards, Mr. Morello and his hard-working staff were presented the Platinum All Seasons Award. This award recognizes the commitment and dedication to merchandising excellence for Ontario-grown fruits and vegetables.

The Foodland Ontario Retailer Awards program recognizes grocery retailers for their innovative promotion of Ontario-grown fruits and vegetables. Every year, nearly 1,250 stores across our province take part in the promotion of Ontario-grown produce.

I'm pleased to learn that Morello's Your Independent Grocer has earned this prestigious award in the past, and I wish them continued success in the promotion of Ontario's high-quality foods in my community for many more years to come.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Today we heard from the Auditor General about widespread systemic waste in the McGuinty Liberal government: trips, luxury cars, gym memberships—all on the taxpayer's dime. It's just another day in the life of a McGuinty Liberal government that does not value the taxpayer's dollar; a Liberal government that measures progress in media releases and handouts to friends, not by real results; a Liberal government that is adrift without a plan for the province.

Today is another sad chapter in Dalton McGuinty's wasteful regime. We've already seen McGuinty and his entourage flush away our tax dollars on items like the \$6 million to remove the "C" from the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.; \$219,000 to redesign the Ontario trillium logo; \$20 million to quietly give raises to appointees to government agencies and boards; \$2 million for an inaccurate, partisan advertisement about health care; \$91 million to fire nurses; \$16 million for Dalton McGuinty's "I won't raise your taxes" Liberal ad agency; \$40 million and counting for the illegal occupation at Caledonia; enormous hotel bills; eye-popping consultant bills; and the list goes on and on.

In the last election, Mr. McGuinty promised to respect the taxpayer's dollar. The people of Ontario made the mistake of taking him at his word.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Yet again, an example of how this provincial government, the McGuinty government, is not listening to the people of northern Ontario: We have today, yet again, another press release in northern Ontario where Tembec, in this case, has announced the permanent closure of the Tembec mill in Smooth Rock Falls, the only employer in the community. We have 185 unionized jobs, with almost 50 jobs in management, that are lost permanently. The community, the union and others have been after this government to work with them to find a way to assist in the restructuring that's necessary in the industry to save employers like Tembec's Smooth Rock Falls mill. Where are we at? There's hardly a whisper from this government and, yet again, in this case, over 200 jobs lost.

This government doesn't get it. You have to be full partners in doing what needs to be done in order to restructure this industry—no more platitudes about programs that nobody buys into. This government stands up and says, "We've given hundreds of millions of dollars in loan guarantees." All of these people have credit, they don't need more, and there's about a 3% take-up on that program. What we need you to do is to deal with the key issues, which are the cost issues for these particular employers that have basically closed down. In the case of Smooth Rock Falls, we need you to work with the workers through the union, with the community through the mayor's office and others in order to assist in figuring out what we do now that Tembec has said, "We are walking away from that mill," and helping us to restructure some sort of offer to take that mill back over and to put it back into production sometime in the future. Anything short is a sellout for those community members.

NESTLÉ WATERS CANADA

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): It gives me great pleasure to be able to rise in the House today to recognize a manufacturing plant in my riding that has shown a real commitment to environmentally aware manufacturing.

In recent years, the Nestlé Waters Canada plant in my riding of Guelph-Wellington has made great strides in reducing their plastic and paper consumption. In the first quarter of 2007, they will reduce the amount of plastic being used in bottles and caps by 19% and 10% respectively. The little plastic plugs that are blown into bottles will be one-fifth smaller come next year. They are also reducing the size of the labels, which leads to 20% less paper use. Last year, Nestlé reduced the height of their cardboard trays in which the bottles sit by 30%, therefore using less corrugate, as well as reducing the amount of shrink wrap that is wrapped around each case of water.

Nestlé has also partnered with transport companies to secure new lightweight equipment. This resulted in 7% less CO₂ emissions for their trucks in 2006, and they expect this number to go up to 15% less CO₂ emissions in 2007.

One of the three Rs of waste management is “reduce.” Nestlé Waters Canada is doing its share to reduce air emissions and packaging. Now we just—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): Last Wednesday, I attended a conservation fair hosted by the Ministry of Energy. As you know, conservation is a priority for the McGuinty government, and I was happy to participate and discuss the various methods of conserving energy right in your own home.

One of the methods promoted at the fair was the use of compact fluorescent light bulbs, or CFL bulbs. These light bulbs are very important for our environment because they use 75% less electricity than an incandescent light bulb and can save the consumer \$50 per light bulb in their electricity bill each year.

One of the many participants in the fair was a group called Project Porchlight. Their goal is to distribute 250,000 CFL bulbs in the Ottawa area, a task they took on early last month. I was happy to help them with their campaign back in November and hope that their initiative will be extended to other ridings in Ontario.

There is a culture of conservation in our province, the results of which are reflected in a report written by the Conservation Bureau's chief energy conservation officer, Peter Love. In that report, Mr. Love notes that Ontario received a B-plus grade from the Canadian Energy Efficiency Alliance in its 2006 national report card on energy efficiency. This grade is up from a C-minus, which we inherited from the Tories, and since we have taken power, we've seen significant improvement.

We will see further improvements thanks to our energy efficient amendments to the Ontario building code, which will save Ontario forever into the future. The continuing co-operation between our government and groups like Project Porchlight will bring us even closer to receiving an A-plus on our next report card.

EMPLOYMENT IN PRINCE EDWARD–HASTINGS

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward–Hastings): I want to share with the people of Ontario that my community has a problem—a good problem. It appears that the number of jobs available in the Quinte area is exceeding the number of people available to fill them. This situation was highlighted for me last week when the city of Belleville held a job fair to attract individuals and families to our area. I particularly want to applaud Karen Poste of the city of Belleville for organizing this event.

I would like to take this opportunity to do a commercial for my riding. Whether it be Quinte West, Prince Edward county, the city of Belleville, Tyendinaga township or the town of Deseronto, we offer a quality of life second to none. We have beautiful geography and great people, and we are particularly blessed with a large number of high-quality, high-level, progressive employers. But for local industry wishing to expand or new industry locating in our area, they are finding it increasingly difficult to attract new employees simply because of the current low unemployment rate in our immediate area. So I say to the people of Ontario or, indeed, of Canada: If you're considering relocating, please consider Prince Edward–Hastings. It's a great place to live and a great place to work. Visit us for a day but plan on staying for a lifetime.

ANNUAL REPORT, AUDITOR GENERAL

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table the 2006 Annual Report of the Auditor General of Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Mr. Gravelle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 168, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 168, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay–Superior North): This legislation, if it is passed, will go a long way to restoring fairness and balance to the workers' compensation system by annually indexing workers' benefits to the consumer price index, thus creating a cost-of-living increase for injured workers.

I appreciate the all-party support for this bill, and I want to particularly thank the Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group for their perseverance in moving this legislation forward.

VISITORS

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wonder if people might join me

in welcoming a fantastic group from Pathways to Education Canada, led by Carolyn Acker and these fantastic students who are revolutionizing the way we do education in the great community of Regent Park.

MOTIONS

ADDRESS BY LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): First of all, I do not have a motion for night sittings, just to be conciliatory and nice to the opposition at this time of the year. That's the only reason, of course.

But I do have another motion. I seek unanimous consent to move a motion respecting an address from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that, immediately preceding oral questions on Thursday, December 7, 2006, the House shall suspend during pleasure to receive a 10-minute address from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, and that, immediately following His Honour's retirement from the chamber, oral questions shall commence.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

1350

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): Our government fundamentally believes that children in need of protection must be better off as a result of involvement of our child protection system in their lives. This fundamental principle is the driving force behind the work we do on a daily basis to improve and strengthen the child protection system.

Our government has taken unprecedented action to strengthen the performance of Ontario's child protection system, and today we are taking still more action: a new, higher standard of increased scrutiny and greater accountability for children's aid societies in Ontario.

Our resolve for higher standards began the day we were elected. It began with the formation of a real Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Gone are the days of lip service to children with no money attached. Under this government, Ontario children and youth have a seat at the cabinet table.

Our drive for higher standards continued with a new Child and Family Services Act, now in effect. That new

legislation means more accountability for children's aid societies and protection for children. It means a standardized complaints process and an independent, neutral third party to hear them. The Child and Family Services Review Board will make timely and binding decisions, and the Ontario Ombudsman has jurisdiction to oversee complaints about that process.

We set higher standards by introducing a new regulation in February 2006 that requires children's aid societies to complete full criminal background checks for all placements, even where a child is placed with members of an extended family. Our higher-standards agenda has also led to the introduction of legislation that would make the child advocate an independent officer of the Legislature. With the will of this Legislature, the child advocate will never again be muzzled by the government of the day but will be a truly independent advocate, giving our most vulnerable children and youth the strong voice that they deserve.

Our commitment to higher standards is also found in this government's decision to shine the light on children's aid societies by expanding the mandate of the Auditor General to conduct value-for-money audits of the broader public sector. We gave the auditor this power so that, for the first time ever, he could conduct an audit with full access to CAS files and therefore be in the best position to identify areas that require further attention.

Today, the Auditor General has released his report, which includes the first value-for-money audit of CASS in Ontario's history. I would like to thank the Auditor General and his staff for their work.

While I have found the findings disappointing and disturbing, this report presents us with an opportunity to take further action to strengthen the child protection system and the children's services sector as a whole. Over the past several weeks, I have personally acquired a good understanding of the findings and given thoughtful consideration to the issues identified and the steps that must be taken.

I am pleased to announce today the steps our government is taking in response to the auditor's findings. It is an action plan for higher standards.

First, my ministry is implementing every single recommendation of the Auditor General. In fact, some of the ministry's action items were completed by November 30.

Second, I have directed all children's aid societies to implement every single recommendation of the Auditor General.

Third, all CASSs are to provide a detailed report back to the ministry by the end of March to demonstrate their progress in this regard.

In addition to these steps, we are going further, because Ontarians' investment in protecting vulnerable children must be accounted for and must meet a higher standard.

We are creating a new accountability office that will monitor whether children's aid societies are meeting their legislated requirements for the care and protection of

children and ensure that corrective action is taken as needed. This office will assess and report on agency performance and provide my ministry's staff with the training and tools they need to provide better oversight and create a new culture of continuous improvement for CASs.

We are requiring children's aid societies to meet higher standards—as non-discretionary as those of the Ontario public service for its own employees and programs—in such areas as the procurement of goods and services; travel, meal and other expenses; hospitality; and the management of fleet vehicles.

We are conducting an independent assessment of the fleet requirements of children's aid societies, so that where less expensive alternatives exist, CASs will be directed to relinquish vehicles as quickly and economically as possible, with savings redirected into services for children and youth.

We are requiring regular audit reporting by all children's aid societies, and we are strengthening accountability and enforcement by including these higher standards in more detailed annual agreements with CASs and all other ministry-funded agencies.

I have already met with the executive director, board chair and treasurer of each of the four children's aid societies audited. I shared with them my disappointment in the auditor's findings and committed that my ministry would work with them to address the issues raised in the report.

My ministry has been working with these CASs to hold them accountable for the implementation of the Auditor General's recommendations that apply to each of them.

With the support of my ministry, each of the four CASs has already put into practice a number of policies and procedures that respond to the Auditor General's recommendations. Examples include tightening controls on travel reimbursement policies to ensure that detailed and accurate receipts accompany all reimbursement claims; reporting back to their boards of directors to track improvements in areas identified by the auditor; introducing new policies and reporting requirements for overtime, after-hours on-call service and mileage claims, which have already resulted in savings that are being redirected to front-line services; reviewing staffing structure in the context of the intake process to ensure that adequate resources are available to respond to referrals in order to ensure that children at risk are seen within mandated timelines; and introducing performance plans for staff that are aligned to improvement targets based on the findings of the auditor.

My ministry and I will continue to work with each of these CASs and with all other CASs to ensure that continuous improvements are made to address the auditor's recommendations.

I am also inviting the Auditor General to undertake a follow-up audit of these four CASs in 2007 to assess the progress that has been made.

The findings and recommendations in the Auditor General's report represent a real opportunity for everyone involved in the child well-being and protection system to work together to strengthen it.

There is an attitudinal change that is occurring. There is an understanding that it is a new day and there are higher standards to be met. It is about understanding that the almost 300,000 children and youth served by our protection system every year deserve the very best and that taxpayers deserve peace of mind in knowing that their hard-earned dollars are being invested wisely. When it comes to protecting our children, no standard can be too high.

1400

VOLUNTEERS

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Today, the province of Ontario is joining with jurisdictions around the world to recognize December 5 as International Volunteer Day.

This important day of recognition was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1985 as a means to make visible the contribution of volunteers and to encourage committed volunteerism around the world. In that spirit, I acknowledge with great pride the more than five million Ontarians who volunteer each year selflessly and generously in communities across this province.

This morning I had the opportunity to thank Ontario's volunteers at the Baycrest Centre. Every year, more than 6,000 volunteers generously offer Baycrest their specialized skills and expertise to lend a helping hand. Baycrest is unique in its vision but is typical of the countless organizations that serve all of our communities across Ontario: the Yee Hong Community Wellness Foundation, Boys and Girls clubs, athletic associations, Victorian Order of Nurses and Special Olympics, just to name a few of so many of these wonderful organizations of volunteers. The success of all these programs depends greatly on the time that volunteers give.

As the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, it has been my pleasure to preside over many volunteer service award ceremonies during the past year. Many of you in this House have joined me at these events. This year alone, in our 20th anniversary, we presented more than 9,000 Volunteer Service Awards and 17 Outstanding Achievement Awards for Volunteerism in Ontario. Over the past 20 years, tens of thousands of Ontarians have been presented with the trillium pin and wear it proudly as they serve.

As we honour these individuals, we must also be mindful of the collective impact that volunteers have on our society. Their influence does not end at helping one person or group or cause; it also enhances the civil spirit that is at the heart of every strong community and strengthens Ontario as a whole.

International Volunteer Day also provides us with an important opportunity to thank and acknowledge the

45,000 non-profit organizations which are at work in every corner of this province.

This government is committed to its volunteers and to the newcomer community in Ontario. To engage our newcomer community in volunteerism further, I am pleased to say that we are working with three volunteer organizations—the Catholic Immigration Centre of Ottawa, the Maytree Foundation and the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants—on projects that will focus on strengthening key aspects of volunteerism in Ontario's growing, diverse multicultural communities.

Finally, I would comment in particular on the contribution of youth to volunteerism in Ontario. Ontario's youth volunteered at a rate of 63% and accounts for 18% of all volunteering hours in our province. Ontario ranks above the national average of 55% and continues to rise. These remarkable young people not only contribute their time, but bring a fresh perspective to the organizations they serve. Youth are the future of volunteerism in Ontario and demonstrate how powerful young people can be in effecting change.

I am confident that all members of the House share this government's commitment to building a strong and vital community of volunteerism in Ontario. We continue to recognize the contributions of Ontario's volunteers through our awards programs. The Volunteer Service Awards, the Outstanding Achievement Awards for Volunteerism and the Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers are just some of the ways the government of Ontario recognizes volunteers.

Volunteerism and the non-profit organizations they serve are leading Ontario into a much brighter future.

On behalf of all the people of Ontario and all members of this House, I would like to observe International Volunteer Day by congratulating all those who serve with dedication in communities across this province. It is my hope that their tireless efforts and considerable achievements will inspire all Ontarians to become involved and to make a difference in communities across this great province. Thank you so much, volunteers of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Statements by the ministry? Responses?

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I rise to respond to the statement by the Minister of Children and Youth Services today. When you listen to this kind of statement, adopting all the recommendations of the Auditor General, and they describe it as an action plan, it sounds good at face value until you look at the fact that oftentimes the best defence you can try to adopt to suggestions—indeed well-founded suggestions, in this case, of complete incompetence, complete negligence or both—is a good offence. In fact, when you look at the record here, what you see is a government and a minister that have not dealt with this, notwithstanding that a lot of

this material has been known to them for some considerable period of time.

If you go back to the first point in time when they knew—a question we have been trying to get the answer to for several days now—the deputy minister of this department had a briefing from the Auditor General in September, when a lot of this information was brought to the attention of the deputy minister in detail, which means the minister as well. Here we sit, in December 2006, finally hearing from the minister that there's going to be an action plan.

It gets worse: There were other communications, obviously, that took place between the children's aid societies, the Auditor General and the government, to the point where a senior official in the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services could write, for example, to one children's aid society congratulating them on what they had done as of April this year in addressing some of the shortcomings that had been identified.

But the worst thing of all is that the minister has not stood up in her place today and said that they've had quarterly reports—quarter in and quarter out—at the government and at the minister's office, detailing budgetary and other kinds of spending practices by the children's aid societies for a long period of time. This government, the McGuinty government, watered down those quarterly reports so they wouldn't contain the kind of detailed information on budget variances that would allow people to draw conclusions as to misspending that might be going on. Furthermore, the Auditor General found that “in two of the three regional offices we visited, there was little evidence that ministry staff reviewed the quarterly reports or followed up with societies to ensure any necessary corrective actions were taken.”

What did the Auditor General recommend in the wake of all of that? He recommended that we go back to the kind of quarterly reports that the McGuinty government and this minister abolished a year ago, which contained the detailed information on spending variances and so on. What they have done is abolish the detailed quarterly reports that were previously received—which, by the way, they didn't read anyway—and substituted less-detailed quarterly reports. That is what has allowed a culture to develop in the ministry and in the children's aid societies where they place Bermuda shorts for trips ahead of winter coats for the kids, Bermuda shorts for the people in this area ahead of winter coats for the kids.

For the minister to get up and talk about how she is accepting every single recommendation without fail and that it's all going to be wonderful and every problem is going to be solved completely ignores the fact that they've known for a long time and that their deputy minister knew in September—there's evidence that the children's aid societies and the ministries themselves knew a lot sooner than that; perhaps as far back as April. If they had been reading the original quarterly reports and hadn't decided to water them down to reduce accountability so that we've got more spending on SUVs, more spending

on trips, more spending on expensive restaurants and less spending available, therefore, for the vulnerable children of Ontario, then we wouldn't be in this mess, if they had been on the job and actually exercising any modicum of accountability whatsoever.

Far from deserving any congratulations for this, this government deserves to be condemned for the attitude, which has been allowed to seep through every ministry and every department, that the taxpayers' money is Monopoly money and this is some sort of game show we're playing here, when in fact this money is sorely and desperately needed for a variety of public services.

They only act when they're caught out. That's the only time they act to show any accountability. That is disappointing and a disgrace.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): In recognition of International Volunteer Day, I want to say thank you to some outstanding organizations and their volunteers, who are representative of the volunteer spirit that contributes so much to the quality of life in this province.

Thank you to the 250 volunteers of the Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold program that provides beds, meals and clothing to over 1,200 individuals and their families each winter season throughout York region.

Thank you to the 1,200 volunteers of the Carefirst Seniors and Community Services Association who deliver a full range of community support services to more than 6,000 senior, disabled and other clients annually throughout the GTA's Chinese community.

These organizations and many like them make Ontario the great province that it is, and we thank them.

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CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To respond to the minister responsible for children and youth, the McGuinty government wants people to believe that problems with children's aid societies and more serious problems within the Ministry of Children and Youth Services didn't happen until the auditor's report was about to be released last week. The McGuinty government wants people to believe that this suddenly cropped up.

Reading the auditor's report is very instructive because he spends 24 pages of his report detailing the inaction and the misguided action that has been happening within the Ministry of Children and Youth Services under the McGuinty government. The auditor points out—and I want to quote him here, because the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the McGuinty government, was receiving quarterly reports that were indicating there were serious problems at children's aid societies. And what does the auditor say that the McGuinty government did with those reports? “[T]here was no evidence in most cases that ministry staff even reviewed

[quarterly] reports or followed them up with society staff to ensure the necessary corrective actions were taken.” The McGuinty government that wants to pretend that it's somehow looking after these vulnerable children was ignoring the very quarterly reports, not just for one year but for many years, that indicated there were serious problems and corrective action needed to be taken. That's what the auditor says.

But the auditor goes on. The auditor, in his year 2000 report, called for more effective monitoring of children's aid societies to make sure that children in need were being adequately protected. Is that what happened? In fact, that didn't happen. In 2003, the reviews of child protection files were cut. The very things which might give an indication of, “Is there something seriously going wrong here?” were cut—those kinds of reviews.

It doesn't end there. In 2005-06, the McGuinty government also cut the service and financial reviews. So the very things that the McGuinty government wants to boast about taking action on today—they actually cut those reviews a year and two years ago, the very reviews that again would have indicated that there are serious problems happening at children's aid societies, that some of the money isn't going to look after vulnerable children; it's going elsewhere. The McGuinty government didn't increase the reviews; they didn't pay attention to the reviews; they cut them.

It doesn't end there, because we know, unfortunately, from the deaths of some of these vulnerable children and the investigations that were conducted into these deaths, that there were other warnings given to the McGuinty government over the last three and a half years. What did they do with those warnings? They ignored them. And we know from the statements of the Provincial Ombudsman, who has said repeatedly, over more than the last year, that there are serious problems at children's aid societies, that he is receiving complaints from a number of parties about things that should be happening at CASs that are not happening and other things that are happening which shouldn't be happening. A repeated request by the Ombudsman to be given investigative and oversight authority as to what is happening at CASs, and what did the McGuinty government do? They ignored the Ombudsman as well; told the Ombudsman to mind his own business.

The McGuinty government should not be congratulated today. The McGuinty government should take a serious look in the mirror at itself, because what has happened here has also happened with autistic children, the way that they have been taken advantage of and manipulated. It has also happened with the national child benefit supplement, where the McGuinty government continues to take \$250 million of federal money out of the pockets of the lowest-income families and the lowest-income children in this province.

The McGuinty government should not be patting itself on the back today. It should be asking itself how it could be so terribly neglectful of vulnerable children.

DEFERRED VOTES

LONG-TERM CARE HOMES ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LES FOYERS DE SOINS
DE LONGUE DURÉE

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 140, An Act respecting long-term care homes / Projet de loi 140, Loi concernant les foyers de soins de longue durée.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1415 to 1420.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Peterson, Tim
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldip	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Matthews, Deborah	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Mauro, Bill	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	McGuinty, Dalton	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	McMeekin, Ted	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McNeely, Phil	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Meilleur, Madeleine	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Crozier, Bruce	Milloy, John	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Mitchell, Carol	Van Bommel, Maria
Dhillon, Vic	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Watson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Parsons, Ernie	Wilkinson, John
Duguid, Brad	Patten, Richard	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Peters, Steve	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Klees, Frank	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Kormos, Peter	Scott, Laurie
Bisson, Gilles	MacLeod, Lisa	Sterling, Norman W.
Chudleigh, Ted	Martel, Shelley	Tabuns, Peter
DiNovo, Cheri	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tascona, Joseph N.
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Tory, John
Hampton, Howard	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Horwath, Andrea	Ouellette, Jerry J.	
Hudak, Tim	Prue, Michael	

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 57; the nays are 28.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on social policy.

The Speaker: The bill is referred to the standing committee on social policy.

HUMAN RIGHTS CODE
AMENDMENT ACT, 2006LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LE CODE
DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 107, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code / Projet de loi 107, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1424 to 1434.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramal, Khalil
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Matthews, Deborah	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Mauro, Bill	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	McGuinty, Dalton	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	McMeekin, Ted	Smitherman, George
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McNeely, Phil	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Colle, Mike	Meilleur, Madeleine	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wilkinson, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Parsons, Ernie	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Patten, Richard	Zimmer, David
Duncan, Dwight	Peters, Steve	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peterson, Tim	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Amott, Ted	Klees, Frank	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Kormos, Peter	Scott, Laurie
Bisson, Gilles	MacLeod, Lisa	Sterling, Norman W.
Chudleigh, Ted	Martel, Shelley	Tabuns, Peter
DiNovo, Cheri	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tascona, Joseph N.
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Tory, John
Hampton, Howard	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Horwath, Andrea	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John
Hudak, Tim	Prue, Michael	

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 58; the nays are 29.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

VISITORS

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: We have our page Mackenzie Gunn from my riding of Durham, and with us today are her parents, Kim and Peter Gunn, grandparents Jim and Sherri Richards, uncle Scott Richards, and another guest. Welcome.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I'd just like to take this opportunity to welcome students from Regina Mundi in London. I hope you enjoyed your day here at Queen's Park and the opportunity to have met the Premier.

ORAL QUESTIONS

CT SCANS

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. It's hard to know where to begin with this shocking outline of waste and mismanagement on so many fronts from the Auditor General today, but I think it's best perhaps to start with the question of the CT scans.

We read in the Auditor General's writings that radiation levels in CTs are significantly higher than in X-rays, that physicians and staff seem unaware in many cases that CTs have higher radiation levels, and that proper settings are not used on the children of Ontario when they have CT scans. On page 14, the Auditor General says that "children exposed to radiation are at a greater risk of developing radiation-related cancer later in life."

He goes on to say that since children's organs are more sensitive to radiation than those of adults, the use of an adult setting for one CT examination of a child's abdomen and pelvis was estimated to be equivalent to over 4,000 X-rays, which is eight times the radiation an adult would be exposed to on the same setting.

My question is this: Parents across the province are asking themselves today how this could happen. I wonder if the Premier could tell us: How could your government allow CT scans to be used on children and adults in Ontario without proper training and without proper safety controls?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like to start by saying that we're grateful for the work of the Auditor General. It gives us the opportunity, of course, to have a detailed focus on a number of areas.

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In this one in particular, I would note that CT scans are not something that has come to life in Ontario simply in the last three years. This challenge, which has been well presented by the auditor, is one that presumably has been in place for some time.

We have been working under the auspices of the auditor's advice and working with the Ontario Medical Association on the creation of a diagnostic imaging safety committee. This has been in place for several months now.

We're working very, very judiciously to bring forward recommendations that will allow us to do a more appro-

priate job of tracking all of the radiation associated with the advice on offer from the Auditor General, we accept it, and we're working very vigorously to ensure that we take appropriate and due advice from him.

Mr. Tory: This minister has more reviews going on than a movie magazine.

There are parents in Ontario who have one very simple question: If their child is going in for a CT scan today, tomorrow or the next day, they want to know, "Is my child going to be safe? Is my child going to be exposed to an unacceptably high level of radiation?"

As we've discussed with the Minister of Children and Youth Services, because of the way the system works, you have known about the auditor's findings for some period of time. You now say that you have a committee and a study and a review going on about this.

What we want to know and what I ask you is this: What specific steps have you taken now, for example, to tell all of the hospitals in Ontario that have a CT scanner that they should, at the very least, be making sure that the setting they use when a child is having a CT scan is a setting for a child, not what the Auditor General found in the hospitals he visited? Have you done even something as simple as that?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member seeks to draw a conclusion that is inappropriate for him to draw.

Indeed, related to the work of the Auditor General, we do receive benefit of the work that's ongoing. Accordingly, the ministry has been responsive, working, as I said earlier, through the auspices of our partnership with the Ontario Medical Association, on a diagnostic imaging safety committee. This is designed to ensure that people are following the appropriate guidelines across the broad platform of the provision of these services in the Ontario health care system.

I say again to the honourable member that if he turns to the member who sits beside him, he will know that this was a piece of business in which, if he draws the conclusion that I should have been more proactive, he then should draw the conclusion that his seatmate too should have been more proactive.

The point is that the Provincial Auditor has given us a very, very good piece of advice and direction; we're heeding it to a T and working very vigorously with our partnership in the hospitals and the Ontario Medical Association to ensure that radiation is being offered in a fashion that is—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: I say with respect to the minister that there isn't one parent in Ontario who will take any heart or any comfort from your either blaming a previous government or failing to take responsibility yourself or failing to indicate what you've done now about this, because, I repeat, what the parents of Ontario want to know is, if their child is going to have a CT scan now or in the future or if they had one in the past, "Is it safe? Is my child going to be safe?"

You suggest that I made this up. I'm quoting the auditor, who says, "[I]n close to 50% of the selected cases, the appropriate equipment settings for children were not used."

All I asked you was whether you, having known about this for months, since you had the auditor's findings in your ministry's hands, have done anything to communicate with the hospitals of Ontario that, at the very least, they should make sure that the children's settings that are referred to here are used when CT scans are done on children so they can be safe? Have you done anything other than appoint another committee?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member likes to stand in his place and pretend that it is not necessary to work forward on issues like this in partnership with those who are providing the service on the front line, so he scoffs at the suggestion that a committee, as an example, is an appropriate way to respond to a circumstance that's occurring across a broad platform of service, involving hundreds and hundreds of different officials in a variety of self-governed institutions.

Accordingly, we have worked with our partners through the Ontario Medical Association and the Ontario Hospital Association to ensure that as we go forward, we're doing so in a fashion which heeds the very best advice of the Auditor General and which sees people who are responsible on the front line for operating the equipment in a fashion in accordance with its appropriate use.

This is work that has been ongoing as a result of the report and the information from the Auditor General. I say that we take that seriously and that we've been working vigorously since the information was made available. It is an example of the additional capacity that our government has offered.

We're grateful to the Auditor General for the work he has done in the hospital environment. We are, on behalf of Ontario's—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. For more than a year now, we have been questioning the government, the Premier, the minister and others on the data contained on the wait times website in the health care area. For that very same year, you've been telling us that all the data we have is up to date and accurate.

On the other hand, the auditor says today in his news conference that we should take this wait time data with a grain of salt. In fact, he referred to it as misleading, and he has raised serious doubts about the accuracy of that data. He says, "The starting point for measuring the wait time for tests was not sufficiently defined. As a result, the hospitals reported wait times differently."

My question is: Given that the hospitals are reporting waiting times differently, why should anybody rely on any of the data you have when the auditor himself has found that it should be taken with a grain of salt and

describes it as misleading? Why should anybody else in Ontario rely on it if he can't?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think it's important to note that there will be, in response to this, a variety of views that are brought forward, including from those who are medical doctors who are advising in helping to develop strategies with respect to greater absorption of access to MRI and CT. We've increased access to MRIs by 78%. We've seen a notable reduction in the wait times, but we recognize that the Auditor General has determined distinctions with respect to in-hospital service and external. These are distinctions which the medical community is not presently operating around.

We will be responding on point to this, but I can assure Ontarians that through the work we have done we have made a priority of enhanced access—78% increase in access to MRIs—as a view of reducing wait times which were allowed to creep up in a very, very serious fashion. All of what the honourable member says may reflect work we have to do, but cannot separate the reality, which is that in Barrie, Ontario, you used to wait a year and now you wait six weeks.

Mr. Tory: The government managed to have such confidence in the data that the Auditor General now says should be taken with a grain of salt and in fact is misleading, that they bought millions of dollars of taxpayer-financed propaganda ad campaigns to say, "The doctor will see you now," and nobody has to wait; it's all wonderful.

But the fact is that people can't really find out how long they have to wait. One of the things the auditor points out is that you take the average waiting time of a patient who is in the hospital, which he says is one day, and average that with outpatients, who wait 30 days, and what do you report to the unsuspecting public? That the wait time is 16 days. In fact, that has nothing to do with the reality of most people out there who are outpatients. It's not an accurate picture. People can't find out how long they really have to wait. When are you going to fix this data so that you'll actually be able to keep your word and provide up-to-date, accurate information to people instead of this information that the auditor says is misleading and should be taken with a grain of salt, and he's right?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Far be it from me to challenge the Leader of the Opposition on this point. But in the work I do, I am also required to abide by the advice and direction offered by medical experts. The determination that the Auditor General has made with respect to the characterization of the data regrettably stands in contrast to that of the advisers who have provided this information. They do not believe it is appropriate to create a distinction between those who are in hospital and out of hospital, but rather that we should look at all patients together. If we do that—if we look at all patients as one

group—it is not appropriate to support the assertions the honourable member has made.

We believe we are collecting this information in an appropriate way. We believe we're doing that in a standardized fashion on the basis of the information that is offered to all Ontario hospitals that are in the provision of these services. If there are ways to improve this, we will look very, very carefully at those and make all members aware of distinctions and decision points—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: Well, you know, when the McGuinty government resorts to the old “expert” defence—the Premier and the Minister of Energy: The coal decision was all based on the experts. Now we have what the Auditor General describes as misleading wait time information, and that's to be blamed on the experts.

I wonder if the experts are responsible for the two-tier wait times arrangement we have in place that the Auditor General talked about today. We have WSIB-funded patients receiving access to diagnostic services quicker than other patients. The auditor says it's happening at least in part, in the hospitals tested and visited, because the hospitals would be desperate without the revenue they get from the WSIB. So what we have is a WSIB patient waiting an average of five days while other patients—everybody else—wait 25 days. Of course, you then report the average number to the unsuspecting public.

When asked about this, the hospitals said the two-tier care was justified as long as other patients got their care within the benchmarks. What do you have to say about this, and again, what are you doing about this inaccurate data?

1450

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I find it interesting that the honourable member stands in his place and suggests that if he were the government of Ontario, he would act in health care without the benefit of experts. Here is a list of the experts we've worked with: Anne Keller, deputy chief of radiology, University Health Network; Leonard Avruch, assistant clinical professor, Ottawa Hospital Corp.; Paul—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'm having difficulty hearing the minister.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Would he guess at this work? Instead, we depended on Diane Barrafato, associate dean, medical radiation and rehabilitation sciences; Julian Chen, director, MR Centre, Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital in Windsor; Julian Dobranowski, chief of diagnostic imaging, St. Joseph's Healthcare. We've worked with a panel of 30 people across the breadth of the province helping to develop the standards. We put those in place. If there's advice that's on offer from the auditor, we will look very, very carefully at that. But the honourable member's disdain for experts, doctors, who have schooled themselves in very expert ways—the disdain that the honourable member offers is much below him.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Premier: Today's auditor's report is a scathing indictment of the McGuinty government's failure to stand up for Ontario's children. The auditor's report confirms inadequate government oversight of \$1 billion spent at children's aid societies—vulnerable children left to suffer while executives waste money on luxury SUVs, exotic trips, high-priced meals and even \$150 car washes.

Premier, when did you first learn about this misuse of public money, and why has your government waited until now to do anything at all about it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): This is my first opportunity to weigh in in an official capacity since the release of the report.

I want to thank the Auditor General and all those involved in this effort. I want to thank him, first of all, for taking full advantage of the new authorities that we extended to him through this Legislature. He is looking at our children's aid societies for the first time, our hospitals for the first time, our school boards for the first time, OPG and Hydro One for the first time, colleges for the first time, and we are grateful that he has taken a careful look at some of those areas and provided us with new and very important information.

I say to the leader of the NDP that because there is a new process in place—by that I mean the traditional audit of ministry direct spending involved the ministry officials in an on-going dialogue. When you have an audit of a children's aid society or a college etc., that is done in much of an arm's-length relationship. So we get notice of this much later than we would have—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Premier. Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: The question you have tried to avoid answering is: When did your government first learn about this? The auditor tells us that your government received in-year quarterly reports from children's aid societies, reports that highlight the problems. What did the McGuinty government do with these quarterly reports? Well, the auditor is instructive there. He says, “There was no evidence in most cases that ministry staff even reviewed [quarterly] reports or followed them up with society staff to ensure the necessary corrective actions were taken.”

You got the first quarterly report—you ignored it; the second quarterly report—ignored it; the third report—ignored it; the fourth report—ignored it. Premier, the auditor says you had lots of notice of problems at children's aid societies, yet the McGuinty government chose to do nothing about it. Why?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: My colleague is mistaken. The information presented today in the Auditor General's report was not found within those quarterly reports, and I think he knows that.

I think what's important here is the steps we have taken to date. Those include creating the first-ever Minis-

try of Children and Youth Services, passing legislation to allow the AG to look at the books of the children's aid societies—by “AG” I mean the Auditor General. We've passed legislation and created an independent appeals process for the children's aid society complaints. We've introduced independent child advocate legislation. Today we've announced specific steps we are taking to ensure that we have ever-higher standards. We are implementing every single recommendation of the Auditor General, and the minister has gone even further by announcing an action plan for higher standards, including setting up a new accountability office, directing children's aid societies to meet the Ontario public service standards for procurement, directing CASs to conduct a review of vehicles against OPS guidelines, and also requiring—

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: All of that is long after many of these issues should have been brought to your attention by the quarterly report.

But the auditor is even more instructive, because the year 2000 auditor's report called for more effective monitoring of children's aid societies to make sure that children in need are being adequately protected. Instead of more effective monitoring, the opposite has happened under the McGuinty government. In 2003, the review of child protection files was cut, and in 2005-06, the McGuinty government cut service reviews and financial reviews of children's aid societies.

Premier, how are our most vulnerable children to be protected and cared for if the McGuinty government ignores the reports that you get and you actually cut the very reviews that are supposed to indicate if something is right or wrong?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP will know that the only party that made cuts to the children's aid society in recent years was his party; he will know that.

Let me tell you a bit more about this action plan for higher standards that we've announced today. Firstly, there is a new accountability office for tougher enforcement. That will mean that we will monitor the children's aid societies to ensure that they are meeting the legislated requirements of service. Secondly, it will mean that we will be able to direct corrective action when that is necessary. We are also directing the children's aid societies to meet the Ontario public service standards for procurement, including vehicles and all expenses. Thirdly, we are directing the children's aid societies to conduct a review of vehicles against OPS guidelines, and they will be directed, where it makes economic sense to do so, to sell the cars that do not meet those higher standards. Finally, we are putting in place a system that requires regular, audited reporting of expenditures. This is much better than quarterly reports; these are audited reports.

The Speaker: New question. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: To the Premier: Let's look at pages 64 and 65 of the auditor's report, because while you and

your minister were asleep at the switch, ignoring the quarterly reports and cutting the reviews that would have indicated where the problems were, this is what was happening: CAS executives drove around in high-end luxury vehicles, dined at high-end restaurants, enjoyed exotic Asian and South American vacations, and bought gym memberships and \$150 car washes with public money.

Premier, working families across Ontario want to see our vulnerable children looked after. I ask again: Why did the McGuinty government ignore the repeated quarterly reports that indicated there were problems at children's aid societies, and why did you cut the very financial and service reviews which would have further indicated where some of the problems were?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Does the leader of the NDP honestly think that children's aid society quarterly reports were going to disclose expenditures on SUVs, vacations and the like? Does he honestly think that those individuals were going to make that kind of information public? The only reason we have access to this information today is because we asked the Auditor General to take a look at what's happening in the children's aid societies. More than that, now that we have received that information, we are acting on that information.

I can say that the minister, when she received this information for the first time in the month of October, asked to meet with the individuals involved, as well as the treasurers and presidents of the voluntary boards, brought them into her office, said, “Let's talk about this; let's find out what's happening,” and directed them to take steps. I can assure you that on the basis of this action plan that we put in place today, every single children's aid society in the province is required to take notice and understand that if they are doing these kinds of things, they will no longer be tolerated.

Again, I thank the Auditor General for bringing this information to us here in Ontario for the first time.

Mr. Hampton: I will thank the Auditor General where he says, “[T]here was no evidence in most cases that ministry staff even reviewed [quarterly] reports or followed them up with society staff to ensure the necessary corrective actions were taken.” On page 70, the auditor says, “In approximately one third of the files reviewed ... caseworker visits were an average of three weeks late, with one being 165 days late. As a result, there is little assurance that all referrals are appropriately assessed and, if necessary, investigated in a timely manner....”

Premier, your government had lots of warnings that there were some big difficulties at the children's aid societies. Why did you wait until three and a half years into your government to finally take action on things that were evident a year and two years ago?

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Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): The interesting thing is

that these issues really aren't new. What's really new is that we are addressing these issues. What's new is that we are the ones—it's our government that's shining the light on children's aid societies and not relying on children's aid societies to provide us with the information that they wanted us to see. It's as simple as that. In establishing an accountability office in our ministry specifically for this purpose, we are not even relying on regional offices that have a whole range of agencies to review. We are focusing specifically on this sector, and what we have learned from the auditor in this sector we will also expand to all other service providers within the children's sector.

Mr. Hampton: I say to the Premier, there's a reason why the auditor spends about 20 pages talking about CASSs and about 26 pages talking about your Ministry of Children and Youth Services: because it's the Ministry of Children and Youth Services that has really dropped the ball.

Here's the McGuinty government's record when it comes to children: You've taken advantage of autistic children and their desperate parents; you continue to claw back \$250 million a year from the pockets of the poorest children in this province; you force parents to give up custody of their children in order to get them the social services they need; and you have ignored repeated reports and reviews that indicated there were serious problems at the children's aid societies. I ask the Premier, in view of that record, why should anyone believe any promise you make with respect to looking after our children now?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It's obvious that the leader of the third party will say anything—anything. I guess that's the role of the opposition parties in this House, to say anything to attempt to suggest that they could do a better job. In fact, he made reference to custody and giving up custody of kids. That didn't happen in our term. What we did was return custody. What we did was to fix the problem that you speak about, just as we will continue to fix—let me give you an example of what I found when I arrived at the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. I got a report on crown wards which covered a two-year period, and when I asked how come I hadn't seen this before, they told me that the previous government did not want to see these reports of Ontario's most vulnerable children. That's what I was told—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT AGENCY SPENDING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. The auditor's report today contained additional—beyond the boondoggle of the children's aid societies and everything else—unbelievable allegations of \$163 million worth of goods and services being purchased by staff at Hydro One using corporate credit cards, all without paperwork to back up the spending. We have \$50,000, in the case of one executive, for personal items: gift certificates, flowers, wine,

dinner theatre, CDs and so on. At OPG, \$6.5 million was spent without proper documentation: \$300,000 on gifts, including 40 leather jackets worth \$8,000.

What we have here is an all-you-can-eat McGuinty Liberal spending buffet. Nothing is too much. It's the taxpayers who are paying so who cares?

My question is this: This is the kind of waste and spending that drives taxpayers and ratepayers absolutely crazy when they pay their bills and their taxes. How can you justify having this kind of misspending going on on your watch, and what are you doing about it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): I too would like to thank the Auditor General for the information and recommendations relating to procurement practices at OPG and Hydro. It was this government that shone the light on OPG and Hydro, and we welcome the information he has brought forward today.

I am meeting with the chair of Hydro One and with the chair of OPG later this afternoon to review the recommendations and to look at courses of action to deal with the auditor's recommendations. It is important to remember that prior to this government coming to office, nobody would have had a look at this. We are also proud of the fact that we applied freedom of information to Hydro One and OPG, and now we're prepared to deal in a meaningful way with the—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

Mr. Tory: I guess the answer to the question, "What you are doing about this gross spending?" is "Nothing." We kind of knew that before, but you hoped it might be different.

We have, in the same report, people in the education system spending \$52,000 over two years on a purchasing card, including \$4,000 on DVDs, eyeglasses and Christmas lights. Another person spent \$2,800 on candies, chocolates, household supplies, even flowers for their own anniversary. It is an all-you-can-eat-McGuinty Liberal spending buffet on your watch: in Hydro One, in the education system and in the children's aid societies. Anybody who wants to do anything can, can spend anything they want on anything they choose, and you do nothing about it because you don't care. You think it's monopoly money, you think it's a game show; it's the taxpayers' money.

I don't know why the Premier won't stand in his place, and why you won't, get up and say what it is you're going to do about this disgraceful, gross misspending of taxpayers' money.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I'll refer that to the Minister of Education. That was the original part of the supplementary.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): We want to put in place a higher standard. That's why the auditor has been asked to do his work, and I'm very grateful that he's done this work.

On October 19, I sent a set of draft guidelines that had been initiated by the previous Minister of Education,

Minister Papatello, to all the trustee organizations. They had been worked on for a number of months before that. Today, I was able to send a final copy of expenditure guidelines to all 72 boards in the province, which will deal with the use of corporate credit cards, travel, meals, hospitality, advertising and advocacy—expenditure on those things.

I think the proof is in our actions, and what we are doing is cleaning up. We know we've got the co-operation in education; the school boards are co-operating with us. The Auditor General was very complimentary of the co-operation of the school boards. We are making it very clear—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Premier. I want to return to the matter of wait times, because the Auditor General has seriously questioned the reliability of your wait times data.

He said the starting point for measuring the wait times for CT scans and MRIs are not well defined, so hospitals are reporting the data differently; 33 hospitals which have MRI and CT scan equipment are not required to provide wait time information at all; and thirdly, the practice of combining in-patient and outpatient wait times skews results. And, as the auditor showed, the median wait time for an outpatient CT scan was significantly higher than the median that was actually reported by the ministry.

Premier, your wait times website data can't be trusted. When can the public and patients get accurate information about wait times?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health, Speaker.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): First I want to say, again, thank you to the Auditor General for the work that has been done here. We're proud to have been the government that unlocked the capacity to take a harder look at what's going on inside the hospital environment, and I rather suspect that there is much more that we can benefit from, without doubt.

We will take a very hard look at that. I must say that we have depended upon expert advice with respect to the establishment of these standards. I know that the official opposition scoffs at the idea that Dr. Alan Hudson and 25 others expert in the area would be responsible parties to provide advice, but they have indeed.

I want to acknowledge that there is a difference of opinion with respect to the issue of collection, distinguishing if you will, between those inside the hospital environment and those outside. That is not something, as best as I'm aware, that has been distinctly done in other environments.

1510

We're going to take a good hard look at it. We believe the information has been collected in a fashion that is

consistent. We'll take a look at the advice from the Auditor General, and one would anticipate that Dr. Alan Hudson and his team of people, who are experts in this field, would give us advice for—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Martel: My supplementary to the Premier is this: It's interesting that the government wanted the Auditor General to do value-for-money audits at hospitals and now they don't want to accept his recommendations. The Auditor General said that "at one hospital the ministry reported wait time for a CT was 13 days, but out-patients actually waited about 30 days." He said that at one hospital "median wait times for out-patient CT exams ranged from six days to 35 days," depending on the site, but the ministry reported this as an average of around 21 days. At his press conference today, he also said that if the website says 60 days, you should take that information "with a grain of salt."

I say again to the government: You wanted the auditor to do the audit. He has; he has made recommendations. When are you going to implement those recommendations so the public can get reliable information on wait times?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Firstly, I would say that the information has been collected in a consistent way. If there's a difference of opinion between an auditor, who is an accountant, and clinical advisers, who are doctors and specialists in radiology, then we should seek to take the advice that is on offer from the auditor and compare and offer that to the experts who have developed our system here. Dr. Alan Hudson is the person I will be holding accountable to work through these issues. As I had an opportunity to say last week in a private meeting with the Auditor General, we most certainly will be taking the advice he offers.

All I suggest to the honourable member is that we differ on one small point, which is that we see a patient is a patient. We haven't, as other jurisdictions have not either, made a distinction between those patients who are in the hospital environment and those who are external. This is an opinion that is on offer from the auditor that I'll be asking the experts, a group of about 25 people led by Dr. Alan Hudson, to take a look at. They will take a good look at this, and we will make amendments, as required, to the way we're collecting information.

WORLD JUNIOR BASEBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. My community of Thunder Bay has a long history and is thought of primarily as a hockey community. Given what the Staal family has been doing recently, I imagine that reputation has been further cemented. However, we do have a long and rich baseball tradition as well, and we in Thunder Bay are very fortunate to have a terrific

volunteer, non-profit-driven organization called the Thunder Bay International Baseball Association. The executive director of that association is here today in the members' east gallery, an old friend and old teammate, Warren Philp, whom I'd like to recognize today.

This group has been doing terrific work around baseball in Thunder Bay and has been trying for some time to host an international event. Minister, can you tell me what your ministry has been doing to support this group in acquiring the 2010 world junior baseball championship?

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): That's certainly not a softball question from my friend from Thunder Bay. First of all, I would like to thank Mike Gravelle and Bill Mauro for their continuous advocating for support of the international baseball championship, which Thunder Bay has been awarded for 2010, something we can all be very proud of.

I also want to say, as a result of our international sport hosting policy, that the McGuinty government is pleased to support this wonderful opportunity for baseball players from around the world, and particularly the host community of Thunder Bay, by providing \$200,000 to help host these wonderful games. This funding will go a long way to providing some of the logistics that people like Warren Philp, Larry Herbert and other great community stalwarts in Thunder Bay are going to have to do to make sure Thunder Bay is ready for 2010.

The McGuinty government was proud to be there at the beginning, providing that money. I believe that one of the determining factors in the international sport hosting body decision was that there was great provincial support, and the games were awarded to Thunder Bay.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): There's no question that our commitment of provincial support went a long way toward securing the games for our community. May I say, that also included a significant contribution from the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. We're thrilled about that. We know that not only will the world juniors be a great sporting spectacle, but they will also contribute millions to Thunder Bay's economy, as well as showcasing the region as a tourist destination, while significantly improving the community's baseball facilities.

Minister, the international sport hosting policy is clearly and significantly helping our community, but can you please provide this Legislature with details on how other communities can benefit from this process? Also, can you speak to the needed, but still uncommitted, federal contribution that's needed to the World Junior Baseball Championships in Thunder Bay?

Hon. Mr. Watson: As part of the international sport hosting policy, I was pleased to go to Calgary to support both Toronto's and Ottawa's bids for the World Junior Hockey Championships in 2009, and was very pleased that as a result of a \$2-million contribution to the World

Junior Hockey Championships, Ottawa will host this internationally renowned competition in 2009.

I'm very proud of the McGuinty government's commitment to amateur sport. We've actually seen a 137% increase in funding for amateur sport. That compares with the previous government's cut of 42% of their funding to amateur sport, which was really quite sad.

The other point is that the province has been there in Thunder Bay since day one, thanks to the intervention of Mike Gravelle and Bill Mauro. Once again, the federal government is missing in action. We call on the new sports minister to come to the table and bring resources and goodwill to make sure that the Thunder Bay championships in 2010 are the best ever held in this country.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: We now have the Auditor General's report, and it's even worse than we thought last week: a \$60,000 luxury car, all-inclusive stays at Caribbean resorts, \$150 car washes, \$2,000 gym memberships, \$2,400 personal trainers and car allowances on top of company vehicles. All the while, children at risk are waiting months for someone to check up on them. What the auditor makes clear is not that these are problems that were only recently identified, but that these are serious problems that are hurting at-risk children and that she ought to have known about all along. Why was this minister so negligent on this file?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): Does the member from Nepean-Carleton really believe that these things started with our government? Where was your government when these things were happening?

As a result of our government expanding the powers of the Auditor General, we now have this information, and our government is not afraid of having this information revealed, because it's only through knowing that information that we'll be able to implement the higher standards that we are implementing as we speak, some of which have already been implemented. So I welcome the Auditor General's findings, and I don't think the previous government served the children of this province well by hiding these kinds of things.

Ms. MacLeod: Today's not a day for patting themselves on the back. It was she who cancelled the reviews. It was she who ignored the reports. The minister's answers are devoid of all credibility. She didn't care what was happening to the money.

The Auditor General writes that the McGuinty Liberals "discontinued reviews of service and financial data in the 2005-06 fiscal year." That's on page 36, if she wants to read it. The government stops reviewing spending, and we end up with managers getting \$60,000 cars; \$60,000 would pay for foster care for six children for one year, just to put that into perspective. That is what's so heartbreaking about this utter failure on your part. You've traded kids for cars. Why did you stand by and

ignore your responsibilities, why did you abandon the reviews and why didn't you review the reports?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: It is very obvious from the opposition's reaction to the auditor's report that they would have been preferred to continue to hide this kind of information. Well, we are establishing an accountability office, because we are working towards higher standards in protecting taxpayer dollars but also in protecting our most vulnerable kids.

We are using this opportunity to go even further than the auditor has gone, in introducing administrative policies that a transfer payment agency in this province has never, ever had to adhere to before. So what we're doing is removing the discretion from boards of governments, removing the discretion from executive directors and having them abide by these higher standards which will better protect our children and better utilize taxpayer dollars.

1520

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Premier, people who are paying more for hydroelectricity across Ontario and workers who are worried because they've lost their jobs as a result of skyrocketing hydro rates would be shocked to read the auditor's report, because on pages 162 and 163 it red-flags Conrad Black-style abuse of credit cards, millions of dollars charged without receipts, cash advances received and charged, all without proper documentation. Premier, how could this still be going on in year four of the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): I am delighted that this government had the courage to move forward with allowing the auditor to look at Hydro One and OPG. I'm quite proud of the fact that we applied freedom of information and salary disclosure to both corporations as well.

I have seen the auditor's recommendations. They are a cause for concern; no question about it. I will be meeting with the chairs of the board and considering what options we have to address them in due course. Again, I want to applaud and thank the auditor for the fine piece of work he has done and to assure the ratepayers of Ontario that the reason we let the light shine in is so we could identify challenges and, yes, address them in a meaningful way that will hopefully give people more confidence in the future.

Mr. Hampton: I say to the Premier: In too many communities across this province, low- and fixed-income people have their hydro shut off because they can't afford to pay the hydro bill. But under the McGuinty government and Hydro One, executives hid \$18 million worth of mystery expenses using a business expenses procurement credit card, with no documentation to back up the

purchases. At OPG, the auditor was unable to verify the existence and whereabouts of computer printers, computer monitors, fax machines and digital cameras purchased with OPG credit cards, and "OPG could not provide evidence" that these articles were in their possession.

I just say to the McGuinty government: You say you've shone the spotlight on OPG and Hydro One. How could these misuses of public money continue if you've shone the spotlight on OPG and Hydro One?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The member would be aware that this is the first time the auditor has reported on these corporations. We welcome that and we'll continue to welcome it. The reason we needed this information is so that we could see these challenges. There's no doubt that we can address these problems. We will address these problems, and we'll address them in a timely and responsible fashion. That's why we brought this legislation in. This is the first report of the auditor. I welcome that report and I welcome this kind of scrutiny in the future because the ratepayers of Ontario deserve to know this information. This government will respond in a meaningful and timely fashion to the challenges that the auditor has pointed out.

CONSERVATION

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, you were recently in my riding and made an announcement between our government and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, an organization committed to conservation, renewing a long-term partnership. It seemed to me that at that particular time, about a week ago or two weeks ago, you were talking about 22,000 hectares of ecologically sensitive land. I think the members of this House would like to know: What does that really mean for us and how does this fit into our conservation plan overall in Ontario?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I'd like to thank the member from Ottawa Centre, who has always had an interest in conservation and preservation issues in this province. I'd like to reinforce that, by working with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, we have ensured that some of the most ecologically significant areas of Ontario are now being conserved for future generations.

After working together for many years, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Nature Conservancy of Canada have renewed their partnership through a five-year agreement to secure ecologically sensitive private lands in Ontario. Under the agreement, the province will invest an additional \$3.1 million in the first year and the Nature Conservancy of Canada will at least match the province's contribution. The partnership builds on a shared commitment to identify, secure and care for significant natural areas in Ontario.

Combining MNR's stewardship mandate with NCC's science, securement and management expertise will

result in the efficient and effective identification, securement and stewardship of more than 50,000 acres of ecologically significant lands—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Patten: Thank you, Minister, for that. I think the members will really appreciate the statement that you just gave.

There are other initiatives, as you well know, that are being taken in Ontario, so my question is: With this significant one of protecting ecologically important and valuable parts of Ontario, how does this complement some of the other initiatives that are taking place?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: This area that I just spoke about is bigger than Killarney park altogether, and this complements the other government initiatives such as the greenbelt and the natural spaces program of the MNR to protect critical ecological systems and habitats.

The partnership supports several programs with a range of conservation goals, including expanding Ontario's system of parks and protected areas, supporting the securement of significant natural heritage lands by other Ontario partners, and conserving important wetland habitats. It has secured a wide variety of habitat types and landscapes, from 17,000 acres of globally rare alvar habitat on Manitoulin Island—which I know, Mr. Speaker, you're very supportive of—to 32 acres of rare habitat at Turkey Point in southwestern Ontario. The partnership has also protected critical habitat for threatened and endangered species such as the globally rare lakeside daisy and the Acadian flycatcher, an endangered bird.

I'd like the member to know that the MNR is committed to the conservation of biodiversity and the use of natural resources in a sustainable manner.

HEALTH CARDS

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. In the Auditor General's report, it is indicated that there are 305,000 more OHIP cards in circulation than there are people in the province of Ontario. It's indicated that there are 11,000 cardholders having claims in all three regions of the province in one nine-month period in 2005.

Meanwhile, over at the ministry of studies and reviews, inaction and bullying, Health and Long-Term Care, what we have there is the ministry indicating, "We'll review our options." That's what they're going to do.

I ask the Premier this question: Mightn't it have been better to reassure the people of Ontario that their health tax dollars you made them pay are going to be spent better by saying, "We are going to get rid of half of that backlog and half of those extra cards in the next 12 months and the other half the year after that"? Why wouldn't you try something accountable like that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I believe that the ministry's response was a desire to give me the opportunity to offer to the Legislature the appropriate explanation. So, on point to the honourable member's question: Obviously we've been under active consideration by the auditor on this report for about a year. In the year since that began, I'm very pleased to be able to tell the member this: As of October 1, 2006, the total number of valid and active health cards in the province of Ontario is 12.52 million, while Ontario's population is 12.69 million. So I do think that this is an area—I appreciate the question from the honourable member—where we've taken very seriously the concerns that have been raised by the Auditor General. We're working to further strengthen our procedures to ensure the valid nature of all of those cards. We have more work to do for sure, but I'm very pleased to be able to report progress on this matter to all members of the Legislature.

Mr. Tory: It's a shame we hadn't heard about this good news before today. Isn't it interesting that just today we find out? It would be helpful if the minister would table in the Legislature what steps were taken and how—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. The government House leader. The Attorney General.

The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: If we could see the detail of what happened and how this was done and make sure we can confirm these numbers, I'd be the first to stand up and say that that's good progress.

We then have, in the same Auditor General's report—and hopefully you'll stand up and tell me that this one has been dealt with as well—that we have a backlog of 255,000 cases where citizenship information has not been authenticated and people have health cards that they're out there with. This is a number, the Auditor General says, that has doubled since 2004.

So my question is this. The ministry, in the case of that instance, said, "We will complete a review of the options." You're big on reviewing options over there. My question is this: You had 305,000 cards that were out there, and you say you've got rid of them all. Show us the data. Bring it in here and table it. Maybe tomorrow would be soon enough.

Secondly, what are you doing about these 255,000 cards that are unverified and where you have a backlog that has doubled on your watch?

1530

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Your arrogance and condescension are really quite startling.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I need to be able to hear the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: When we had the first report, when the Auditor General initiated his report, there were 12.9 million OHIP cards; today there are 12.5 million. This is evidence, I think, that the ministry has worked very hard. I appreciate that there's always more work to

do. The honourable member suggests that that means we review things. Of course, these are matters which do require some consideration before one moves forward.

In addition, I can tell the honourable member that we've worked to dramatically enhance our capabilities to confirm information, to the second question that the honourable member asked. I'll be very happy to send some more information along to him that outlines the steps we've taken to improve the circumstances, and other things we have ongoing to continue to improve the circumstances, related to OHIP cards in Ontario.

CT SCANS

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): My question is to the health minister. One of the very serious concerns the auditor reported on today involved radiation exposure of Ontario children to CT scans. In 50% of the cases he reviewed, it was adult settings on CT scans that were used on children, and the result of that is a level of exposure in the order of about 4,000 X-rays, or eight times the exposure that an adult would receive. Britain and the US have radiation dose levels to guide professionals in establishing CT radiation exposures for patients. Why can't Ontario use these guidelines now so that we can protect children right away?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As I had a chance to answer an earlier question to the Leader of the Opposition, we've been working through the formation of a diagnostic imaging safety committee to move forward across the platform of services where radiation is an issue, to be able to do exactly what is on offer. This is an example of a very good piece of advice that has been made available as a result of the decision point that this Legislature took to give enhanced powers to the Auditor General.

We've moved quickly in response to the information. We'll be working with experts—I know that meets with disdain on some sides of this House—to inform all of those who are providing these important services of the most appropriate way to do so. I take the request, the advice that is on offer from the honourable member, as direction, in a sense, that our committee is already working to establish with the OMA and the OHA in partnership.

Ms. Martel: Experts in other jurisdictions, mainly the US and Britain, have looked at this issue and have issued guidelines with respect to appropriate levels of radiation, and I'm wondering why we can't do the same in Ontario now to protect children. You see, the auditor pointed out that physicians and staff at hospitals weren't aware that CT scans exposed patients to significantly more radiation than conventional X-rays. The auditor also pointed out that in a recent survey of pediatricians in the Toronto area, 94% of them underestimated the level of radiation children are exposed to when they have a CT scan. This is critical because exposure can also lead to long-term cancers related to radiation.

I say to the minister again, we have experts in other jurisdictions who have effectively dealt with this matter. Why can't Ontario put in place these guidelines here and now to protect our children here and now?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I'm sorry if I didn't say this clearly enough for the honourable member, but that is exactly what is under way. I'll be pleased to take a future opportunity to inform all members of the House about the specific nature of the steps that have been taken.

REAL ESTATE FRAUD

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): My question is for the Minister of Government Services. Media reports over the summer made constituents in my riding of London North Centre aware of what is called real estate fraud. People are wondering if their homes are safe and what protection the government can provide. For many Ontarians, their home is their largest single investment and it's only natural that they should be worried about some fraudster stealing something so valuable. I've received calls from people in my riding demanding that the government take action to help prevent this despicable crime.

Minister, my question to you is this: How widespread is real estate fraud, and what action have you taken to safeguard people's investments in their homes?

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I appreciate the question from the member from London North Centre. I must say to the Legislature that all three parties are working co-operatively on this issue. We have a piece of legislation before a committee today that we're working on.

The first part of your question was about the size of the problem. I would say that real estate fraud consists of two things: title fraud and mortgage fraud. Title fraud has not changed significantly. We get about 10 cases a year, and that hasn't changed significantly. It's on the mortgage side where we've seen an increase, and it looks like, to the best of our knowledge, it's about a \$15-million problem. So we must deal with it.

The Legislature has a piece of legislation at committee. I think the most significant part of it is that if someone loses their title fraudulently, it will be restored, and if a document is registered against that title fraudulently, that document will be null and void. That's the first, very significant step.

Ms. Matthews: I look forward to hearing more about that. But clearly, Bill 152 does take strong and necessary steps to make sure that no homeowner in Ontario will lose their largest investment, their home, because of title or mortgage fraud. That, I can tell you, will be very welcome news to people in my riding, many of whom have contacted me through my office or when I've met them on the street or in the grocery store. They're concerned about it. They're just wondering whether they're a potential victim of it. I understand that completely.

I look forward to this bill moving forward through the Legislature. I had the honour of sitting in committee

yesterday, where I heard some people make presentations on it. And I look forward to third reading debate starting very, very soon.

But despite the new protections for homeowners under Bill 152 that will guarantee that they don't lose their home, a fraud attempt can still occur and a victim may incur costs such as hiring a lawyer. I understand—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question's been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Phillips: A part of dealing with it is what we call the land titles assurance fund; LTAF is the jargon. I think it's fair to say that I don't think the fund has been as responsive to the public as it should have been and as the public has a right to expect. It's been seen as the fund of last resort, and there is some merit in that. But I think, as my colleague said, there's nothing quite as traumatic as this issue, other than your health. So what we've done with the fund is move it to a fund that you can access quickly—and I mean quickly. Within 60 days of your application, provided you have some evidence that a fraud actually has taken place, we will make a decision. Within 30 days, your title will be restored. And within another 30 days, we will ensure that the issue the member raised—that is, individuals having to put up money to deal with the issue—is dealt with. So within 120 days, we will have dealt with this. I think that's a very significant step forward in making this a responsive fund.

PETITIONS

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I'm receiving more and more petitions to do with the Mary Lake dam, and I have one here.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

1540

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition that comes from the Consumer Federation of Canada and is addressed to the Parliament of Ontario, especially the Minister of Government Services. It reads as follows:

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

"Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

"Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed unanimously on November 30, 2005, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information such as SIN and loan account numbers.

"(2) Should a consumer reporting agency discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the affected consumer.

"(3) The consumer reporting agency shall only report credit inquiry records resulting from actual applications for credit or increase of credit, except in a report given to the consumer.

"(4) The consumer reporting agency shall investigate disputed information within 30 days and correct, supplement or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate."

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to sign it and send it to you with page Arianne.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): "Whereas Longfields and Davidson Heights in south Nepean are some of the fastest-growing communities in Ottawa and Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board has voted to authorize the final design phases for a grade 7 to 12 school to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario has lifted a three-year moratorium on school closings in order to make way for new educational facilities;

"We, residents of Nepean–Carleton, petition the Parliament of Ontario to ensure that the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board continues with plans to build a new grade 7 to 12 school no later than autumn of 2008 to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities."

I have affixed my signature to this.

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I have a petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Northwestern Ontario Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) Diagnostic Clinic has been operating as a demonstration project since December 2004 with funds received through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care;

“Whereas this funding expired July 31, 2006;

“Whereas there is an enormous need in northwestern Ontario for regional access and accurate diagnosis of FASD;

“Whereas, without the northwestern Ontario FASD clinic, services are only accessible through a clinic in Winnipeg, Manitoba, or St. Michael’s Hospital in Toronto, for which there is a four-year wait;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Be it resolved that the provincial government commit to provide ongoing funding for the maintenance of the regional FASD diagnostic clinic, with two sites in northwestern Ontario.”

I have affixed my signature to this, which has been signed by many residents of northwestern Ontario.

LAKEVIEW GENERATING STATION

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Whereas there should be no decisions on the future development of the Lakeview generating station grounds until a full, independent environmental assessment, including air, water, soil samples and a health study of long-term residents, is completed to determine the historical, current and accumulative impact of industrial pollutants on the existing environment of Lakeview, southeast Mississauga, and its citizens; and

“Government includes this assessment and gives its findings equal weight in all mandatory environmental reports regarding the future development of the Lakeview generating grounds.”

I am pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada’s first Nobel Prize recipient; and

“Whereas this great Canadian’s original homestead, located in the town of New Tecumseth”—Alliston—“is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

“Whereas the town of New Tecumseth has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Minister of Culture endorse Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson’s private member’s bill entitled the Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act so that the homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come.”

I agree with that petition, obviously, and I’ve signed it.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I have a petition here from the Canadian Federation of University Women Ontario Council, Toronto branch. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

“Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

“Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

“We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement.”

I’m in accordance and would affix my signature thereto.

GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): I have a petition signed by a number of members of the Cornwall Township Historical Society. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Premiers of Ontario have made enormous contributions over the years in shaping the Ontario of today; and

“Whereas, as a result, the final resting places of the 18 deceased Premiers are among the most historically significant sites in the province, but have yet to be officially recognized; and

“Whereas, were these gravesites to be properly maintained and marked with an historical plaque and a flag of Ontario, these locations would be a source of pride to the communities where these former Premiers lie buried, and provide potential points of interest for visitors;

"Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Enact Bill 25, an Act that will preserve the gravesites of the former Premiers of Ontario."

Since I approve of this, I shall affix my signature and send it to the Clerk's table.

HIGHWAY 417

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas modern highways are the economic lifelines to communities across Ontario and crucial to the growth of Ontario's economy; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been dealing with the planning and design of the extension of Highway 417 for several years; and

"Whereas the previous Conservative government followed through with their commitment to extend Highway 417 to Arnprior; and

"Whereas Highway 417/17 is part of the Trans-Canada Highway system; and

"Whereas local municipal governments, the county of Renfrew and MPP John Yakabuski have continued to press the Liberal government on this issue;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government move as swiftly as possible to approve the extension of Highway 417 through Arnprior to Renfrew and beyond and that this be included in their next five-year plan."

Of course, I affix my name to this, as I support it.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I again have a petition from the Canadian Federation of University Women, this time from the branch in Aurora-Newmarket. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

I'm in agreement and would affix my signature thereto.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly regarding access to trades and professions in Ontario. I'd like to thank the Moje family of Credit Pointe Drive in Mississauga for sending it to me. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

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"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

I'm pleased to affix my signature in support of this petition, and will ask page Philip to carry it for me.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition to do with hydro in Parry Sound–Muskoka. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Hydro One Networks Inc. provides hydro to many communities in the region of Parry Sound–Muskoka; and

"Whereas there have recently been several lengthy power outages in this region affecting both private residences, schools and businesses; and

"Whereas rural customers pay among the highest distribution and delivery charges for electricity;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Energy Board require Hydro One Networks Inc. to make im-

provements in line maintenance and forestry management in the region of Parry Sound–Muskoka to ensure reliable energy for its customers.”

I support this petition.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I have another petition, again from the Canadian Federation of University Women, this time the Peterborough branch. They write to the Legislature as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

“Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

“Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

“We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement.”

I’m in agreement and would again affix my signature thereto.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have another petition in support of skilled immigrants. I especially want to thank Johnny Tang and Bing Gong for collecting the signatures to it. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is committed to establishing measures that will break down barriers for Ontario newcomers; and

“Whereas these measures will ensure that the 34 regulatory professions in Ontario have admissions and application practices that are fair, clear and open; and

“Whereas these measures will include the establishment of a fairness commissioner and an access centre for internationally trained individuals; and

“Whereas, through providing a fair and equitable system, newcomers will be able to apply their global experience, which will not only be beneficial to their long-term career goals but also to the Ontario economy as a whole;

“We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

“That all members of the House support the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, Bill 124, and work to ensure its prompt passage in the Ontario Legislature.”

An excellent petition, and a strong sentiment. I’m pleased to affix my signature in support of it and to ask page Sarah to carry it for me.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2006 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2006 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES (NO 2)

Mr. Sorbara moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 151, An Act to enact various 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 151, Loi édictant diverses mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2006 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Finance for his leadoff speech.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I’m delighted to lead off, one hopes, final consideration of this bill, and would encourage members to give it their enthusiastic support. I might note that I am going to be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge. In mentioning him, I might give him due credit for the measures in this bill and indeed the budget upon which it arises. At the same time, I want to pay public tribute to my predecessor as Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan, the member for Windsor–Riverside—I’m not sure I’m getting that right—and Minister of Energy, because in this bill we are putting into law, with various amendments, enactments and repeals, the legislative work that actually brings into law the measures that were in the budget my predecessor Mr. Duncan presented to this Legislature in late March. I think it was a tremendous budget. In fact, I wished at that time that I was not on sabbatical and could take a little bit of public credit for the budget. But it was really my friend Mr. Duncan and, of course, my parliamentary assistant whose signatures are on this budget and the bill that enacts various measures to bring it to life.

I want to say that that budget was really all about building better infrastructure in this province. Just as our budget in 2005 was about creating a better post-secondary education system and our first budget was about bringing the historic reforms to public education and to our health care system, Mr. Duncan’s budget was about beginning to rebuild this province’s infrastructure in a very significant way. When we have accomplished everything in that budget, we’ll have new rapid transit going into the greater Toronto area by way of a subway extension up to the city of Vaughan, into York region, serving all of the northwest. We’ll have a brand new transit system in Mississauga and one in Brampton—I see my friend from Mississauga West throwing up his arms in excitement.

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That budget invests some \$400 million in new roads, new bridges and new highway systems throughout the province of Ontario, and in particular in the north. There are other infrastructure initiatives in the budget that I won't touch on, but will just say that I think the fact that the Premier actually created a Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal as our government took office—my friend David Caplan from Don Valley East is the minister in charge—was a very wise move. I think that even more, having now spent three years plus in the administration of this government, hearing over and over again wherever I travel that our economic vitality is dependent in large measure on how quickly we can build infrastructure. It really touches every part of infrastructure, whether it's new water systems, large water systems that bring clean, fresh water to new communities, or the replacement of water systems, replacing pipes that have been in the ground, if you dig here in the city of Toronto, for some 100 years; renewing those systems. I think that's why the Premier said it's got to be called public infrastructure renewal: water systems, systems of electricity. I think the fact that the Minister of Energy a few months ago put forward a comprehensive 25-year plan to ensure the availability, the supply of electricity, the affordability, the cost of electricity, and the reliability of the electricity system is one of the things that adds great confidence to our economic future.

I should tell you that wherever I go, people tell me, "You guys have got it right on energy. You haven't played politics with the system. You've got it right." So now there are plans—the Minister of Energy would correct me or give me specific numbers, but I think some 3,000 megawatts of new generating capacity are already in the system.

There are lower prices because of the conservation initiatives that we've taken and the fact that we've brought on supply, so prices are going down. And certainty of supply, the fact that we made the very tough decisions that we're going to begin now the process of preparing to build a new generation of nuclear power so that 10 years from now, 15 years from now, as we're retiring old plants, that new capacity will be there, which will be even more reliable, even safer and even more affordable: That's another part of infrastructure that is so important to the economic future of the province.

But around where my parliamentary assistant and I live, it's all about transportation. It's all about gridlock. It's all about getting on with building that next generation of public transit. It's new GO trains; it's new GO stations; it's new subway lines; it's new transit systems for Mississauga, Brampton and, indeed, Durham. I know my friend and parliamentary assistant would be interested in those as well. The budget that my predecessor presented really went a long way towards that agenda.

Have we finished yet? Of course not. There is so much more to build, but the important thing about this budget is that it gets us started in a very big way. People have asked me repeatedly, "Have you heard yet from the fed-

eral government about their contribution to these projects?" And I have to say, here in this House, "Not yet." Not yet, but we had better, because there will be a terrible political price for the Harper government if they continue to ignore the infrastructure needs and, in particular, the transit and transportation needs of this province; in particular, the greater Toronto area. I fully expect that ultimately Mr. Flaherty will say, "I want in. I want to be part of that partnership. I know it's important. Let's put political differences aside. Let's get building in Ontario." I hope that's what he's going to say, because if he doesn't, there will be a terrible political price to pay.

In these remarks, as we wind up the consideration of what we call the second budget bill—budget bill number two, the fall budget bill—I want to pay tribute both to my predecessor, the now Minister of Energy, and my parliamentary assistant for the work they have done. I think it's going to serve the people of Ontario very well. I think that when these projects are ultimately built, people will look back to the work that both of them did, and the government and the caucus did, and say, "Oh, yes. We got that project started in Dwight Duncan's budget in 2006." And they'll say that that was a good initiative.

I just want to mention a number of things in the time remaining that are also accomplished within this fall budget bill.

We've created a new and enhanced dividend tax credit to encourage greater investment in Ontario corporations. What's that all about? The federal government in its budget made some changes to the dividend tax credit to enhance the environment for investment in Canadian corporations. Setting aside all the politics, we said to Mr. Flaherty, "We're going to mirror that in our own corporate tax legislation," and this does it.

We're increasing our tax credit to the whole world of digital media. Part of the future of this province's economy is in that whole area of digital media and the entertainment cluster, and this budget bill, I say to my friend the member from Erie-Lincoln, my critic, does what needs to be done to strengthen us in that area.

We're giving municipalities across the province more flexibility and additional provincial support in funding brownfield redevelopments and public infrastructure through the use of tax increment financing for two pilot projects. What's that about? In the case of brownfields, it's about strengthening the mechanisms to encourage development in areas that have suffered environmental degradation. If you talk to Dave Levac, the member from Brantford, he'll say that this is incredibly important for his communities. And we're using the mechanism of tax increment financing—a mechanism that's been used in a variety of jurisdictions across North America—on a pilot basis to help fund subway construction and waterfront development in the province of Ontario.

I could go on at length about what this bill achieves, but I want to leave it to my parliamentary assistant, who has done the important work of carrying this bill through the Legislature and through committee. He'll have further comment on it.

I simply want to end by encouraging all members of this House to pass this bill as expeditiously as possible so that the public policy initiatives in it can come into law.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise in response to my colleague the Minister of Finance on Bill 151. I'm going to ask Ian for a couple of glasses of water, if I could. Ian, the hard-working page from the community of West Lincoln, by the way, in the riding of Erie—Lincoln, has done an outstanding job.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: A very good Liberal family.

Mr. Hudak: I'm not so sure.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: We've done our research.

Mr. Hudak: They've done their research.

This is third reading of Bill 151. I was listening to my colleague the Minister of Finance closely there. I do want to say that while we did enjoy Bill 65, the mortgage brokers act, and working with Arthur Lofsky and Sarah Hanafy from his office—they're very good to work with—and while we did have a chance to bring forward amendments and the minister was good enough to share in advance proposed draft regulations on Bill 65, which are now out in circulation, Bill 151, unfortunately, was an experience in the complete opposite. In fact, I know my colleague for Beaches—East York was similarly hard-pressed to come up with amendments in the mere half an hour that was allotted to us. We had some very interesting delegations from groups like the Ontario Bar Association, for example, and by the time the committee had completed its interviews of interested parties and stakeholders, we had but 30 minutes to bring forward proposed amendments to the bill.

This is highly unfortunate, particularly with a bill that has so many schedules that in fact the government ran out of letters with which to name the schedules. Usually each schedule in a bill will be named after a letter in alphabetical order: schedule A, B and so on. There were so many schedules in this omnibus bill that they had to go to schedule Z, and then Z.1, Z.2, all the way to Z.9. So you can understand it was extremely difficult for any member of that committee, be it opposition member or government member, to bring forward an amendment within half an hour, considering—there is Z.9, so that what would be 35—no, actually 36—schedules in the bill.

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Nonetheless, we did our best to bring forward some amendments—not as many as we would have under the circumstances. Also, because of the guillotine motion that had been brought forward by the government, many of our amendments didn't even get a chance to be debated in committee. Not only did they restrict our time to half an hour to bring forward amendments in committee, but if we didn't get our amendments debated or introduced by 5 p.m.—which was maybe a half hour or so, maybe an hour into the committee approximately; again, remember this is a very thick piece of legislation—then there was no debate whatsoever on those amendments. That is highly regrettable because there was

good advice given to us, hard work by staff in our offices and by legislative counsel, and the amendments were not even read into the record for debate. So I'm going to use some time today to talk about the amendments that we did bring forward and the reason behind them, since we were denied that opportunity at committee because of the McGuinty government's time allocation, or guillotine, motion.

I do want to note, as I always like to do as we debate a finance measure, that the Progressive Conservative Party, the official opposition, continues to reject the government's fiscal policies, which are based on high levels of taxation. In fact, one of the first bills this government brought forward imposed the biggest tax increase in the history of the province of Ontario on working families, on seniors and on businesses. As a result, tax rates are highly uncompetitive in our province for individuals and, particularly, for businesses, among the most uncompetitive tax rates in all of North America.

Coupled with the government's high taxation policies is a high spending policy. The government increased taxes substantially in order to fulfill their appetite for runaway spending. If you look at the government's books closely, you will see approximately an 8% program spending increase per annum under the Dalton McGuinty government. This rate of growth of spending, as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation pointed out, is in excess of the Bob Rae government. Bob Rae at the time was an NDP member, most recently was a federal Liberal member, and now, having lost the leadership race, we're not sure where he is going to end up in his next adventure.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Are you going to take him, Tim?

Mr. Hudak: They suggest he'll be coming to the Progressive Conservative Party. Well, if Joe Clark can win—no, I'm sorry, I won't dwell on the history of the party. They've thrown me off track.

The rate of growth of spending has been extraordinary. You have seen some of those excesses and inefficient uses of taxpayer funds brought forward by our leader, John Tory, and Bob Runciman, the member for Leeds—Grenville, who is our lead on the waste-busters initiative at www.wastebusters.ca. We certainly saw evidence of that in the shocking auditor's report that was tabled with the assembly this afternoon.

The third pillar of the McGuinty government's harmful fiscal policies would be high hydro rates. The Dalton McGuinty government has increased hydro rates some 55%, and don't forget that there was a promise by Dalton McGuinty during the election campaign to freeze hydro rates. That was one of the first promises thrown out the window once the Premier successfully had in his hand the keys to the Premier's limousine. Since then we've seen hydro rates go up significantly. We have as well seen a plan—if you can call it that—that has gone back and forth in a number of areas, that at the end of the day created instability in our hydro sector, a lack of predictability, a shifting promise on the coal-fired plants, for example, which has undermined the confidence of busi-

ness investment in Ontario and at the same time has imposed a significant financial penalty, particularly on seniors and those who have fixed incomes.

At any rate, the damage can clearly be seen in the loss of well-paying manufacturing jobs in the province. Manufacturing has always been the bread and butter of the Ontario economy. We're always first in Canada, and first in North America in many respects. I remember in the late 1990s under the Mike Harris government when Ontario led all others in North America in job creation. Sadly, with runaway spending, high taxes and the high hydro policy of the McGuinty government, the opposite has been true when it comes to manufacturing jobs.

I know my colleague Mr. Chudleigh, the member for Halton, has done extensive work in following the number of manufacturing jobs lost. The member for Halton, just on Friday, following the latest Stats Canada data, pointed out that Ontario lost another 4,400 manufacturing jobs in the month of November. "The blood-letting continues while the McGuinty Liberals do nothing," said Ted Chudleigh, because in total, since the beginning of 2005, according to the member for Halton's press release, "Ontario has lost 111,100 manufacturing jobs." Growth in Ontario has been hindered by declines in manufacturing—63,000 jobs.

Government members will try to point out that overall job growth is up, but they always neglect to tell you that what is masking the loss in jobs in manufacturing is the significant growth in government jobs. This is not a sustainable policy. We all know that the best way to finance improvements in health care, education, transportation or other key provincial services is to have a strong economy. You cannot simply grow the size of government while the manufacturing base contracts. That's a recipe for disaster of the kind that we saw under David Peterson, inherited by the NDP government when it took over in 1990. The bottom fell out of the economy and the runaway spending was simply unsustainable, resulting in substantial deficits.

So I think, at the very least, we reject Bill 151 because it does not reverse the harmful McGuinty economic policies. It does nothing to increase the supply of electricity in Ontario or to control hydro rates. It does nothing to reduce the burden of taxation on working families or businesses in Ontario and it does nothing to hold the line on the runaway spending of the McGuinty government, which, I will say again, has been approximately 8% per year on program spending.

I had hoped that we would have seen some better news in a budget bill to help reverse the job loss in the manufacturing sector. My colleague the critic for natural resources, the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka, has brought forward time and time again in this Legislature the devastation caused by the loss of some 6,000 jobs in the forestry sector as a result of the McGuinty government's lack of action. In fact, they have taken action that has just exacerbated the flight of jobs from Ontario. This is particularly harmful to small communities that depend on a large, major manufacturer for employment, for

taxation revenue and for the support of worthy causes in the community.

I think it's always important to set that tone and our regret that steps were not taken in Bill 151 to reverse those harmful decisions.

Speaking of Mr. Miller, the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka and our critic for natural resources, he was kind enough to send me an important letter with respect to provincial land tax reform. PLT reform is part of this bill. If I recall, it was in the Z schedules of Bill 151—Z.1 and Z.2—anyway, at the very back, or close to it, that the government slipped in reform to the provincial land tax. There were consultations on provincial land tax reform; I will grant the government that. However, what is in this bill, I would argue, does not reflect what they heard during their consultations on provincial land tax reform. To be specific, while this bill, if passed as it is, effectively will make the Minister of Finance the mayor and council of the unorganized territories of northern Ontario, meaning that the Minister of Finance could set, at his or her discretion, simply via regulation, if I recall—he does not have to come back here to the assembly—the tax rate on unorganized areas. This is a significant amount of power to entrust to a finance minister, particularly in a government that has broken so many promises and shown no reluctance whatsoever to jack up tax rates whenever they have that opportunity.

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We had brought forward, actually, some suggestions to amend that section of the act. In a general sense, if the government were going to reform the provincial land tax, they should at least ensure that that money is returned for services in northern Ontario. I think Mr. Miller has spoken about this.

I mentioned the letter that he had passed on to me that makes a similar point. It's from the Loring-Restoule Business Association, dated October 31, 2006. The letter says, in part, "We are very concerned about the impact that this reform may have on the economy of the area"—the Loring-Restoule area—"and are also concerned about how any additional money raised will be distributed and accounted for."

It's obvious. You're asking people in the unorganized territories, asking people in the Loring-Restoule area, with no vote and no council meeting, to pay higher taxes at the discretion of the minister's office at the Frost building at Queen's Park and set rates at whatever he or she deems fit—no consultation necessary—and the funds would just flow into the coffers in the Frost building.

The folks here and others across northern Ontario will tell you that if they're paying more in taxes, they would like to see it reinvested in those communities, or at least in the general area, for services that people depend upon.

The letter goes on to say:

"As you are aware, tourism is the industry that drives the fragile economies of most small communities in the north, and anything which has the potential to jeopardize this will have severe negative consequences in these communities. I, therefore, have outlined below some questions, and concerns that this notice has raised.

"Is this PLT reform intended to be revenue neutral or will it raise additional tax money for the province?"

Well, if it is Dalton McGuinty pulling the levers, I think the answer is obvious: It's to increase revenue to the province of Ontario—hopefully not, but there's reason to be suspicious—for things like dropping the "C" in the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. or investing in more middle-manager bureaucrats like the LHINs, as opposed to investing in front-line health care services.

Another question that they pose: "The notice states 'any new revenues that may result from the PLT reform will be used to support services in the north.' What services and to whom, which stakeholders will benefit, and in what proportion?"

Well, a Dalton McGuinty promise is really not worth the paper it's printed on. We've learned that the hard way in the province of Ontario, with some 50 broken promises to date. If he had at least put in legislation that this money would be reinvested in services in the north, folks like those who have written on behalf of the Loring-Restoule Business Association would be mollified in some sense. Sadly, however, the government refused to include those types of provisions in their legislation.

They raise a number of other questions but I won't, in the interest of time, read them all. Here's one more: "There is also some concern that additional tax money raised through PLT reform, administered by the Ministry of Finance, will be targeted to MNR itself to cover budget shortfalls." So the concern is that this is a bit of a shell game. "MNR, at one time, was a thriving and vital ministry and partner in the north, respected for their knowledge and expertise to simultaneously tackle both economic and environmental issues unique to the north, but they now have been reduced in both manpower and influence...."

The concern here is that because of the reduced spending that has been experienced at MNR to deliver services, this money will simply replace that. That's not good enough. I don't think that voters in northern Ontario will be fooled by another Dalton McGuinty shell game.

I thank my colleague from Parry Sound-Muskoka for bringing that to my attention. In fact, he and his colleague the member for Oshawa, Jerry Ouellette, who is our northern affairs critic and a former Minister of Natural Resources himself, had advocated and given me advice on a couple of the amendments to bring forward in that respect.

We had, for example, brought forward an amendment to schedule Z.2 that read as follows:

"I move that section 2 of the Provincial Land Tax Act, 2006, as set out in schedule Z.2 of the bill, be amended by adding the follow subsection:

"Use of provincial land taxes

"(4) All taxes levied under this act shall be used only for the purpose of providing improved services to residents in non-municipal territory."

The government didn't like that. We had one that was based on a similar principle of reinvestment in northern

Ontario. It reads as the last one did, with the exception of this aspect:

"Use of provincial land taxes:

"(4) All taxes levied under this act shall be used only for the purpose of providing improved services to residents in northern Ontario."

So there you have two sensible amendments that the government claims they're going to do anyway. I'm not sure if they'll really follow through. My colleagues here in the Legislature supported it. Groups like the Loring-Restoule Business Association would obviously be supportive, because they bring this forward in their letter. Unfortunately, the government refused to approve these amendments, to make them part of the bill. It would have—because it would be the law, if passed—forced the government to reinvest those dollars in northern Ontario or to the unorganized territories. I can only judge by the fact that the government did not pass these amendments that they have no intention to do so. I do fear it may go as far as some sort of shell game to replace funding they've cut elsewhere, or go into more wasteful funding that has become the hallmark of the Dalton McGuinty government.

The other area I wanted to highlight was schedule A. Schedule A, of course, deals with the Assessment Act. I still have not heard a single member of the government benches—maybe the parliamentary assistant will address this when he has the opportunity, or maybe the member from Scarborough Southwest will have a chance to do so as well—deal with the triple-whammy of assessment conveniently scheduled to take place after the next provincial election. Members will well know that assessments under the Dalton McGuinty government have, I think accurately, been described as "skyrocketing." I had more calls on the most recent assessment than I did in my previous years as an MPP combined. Initially, Dalton McGuinty said he was not going to do anything about skyrocketing assessments, because he didn't run on it. You remember, he said that he wasn't going to do anything about assessments because he didn't run on it. Although I don't remember him running on pit bull bans, for example, either. Nonetheless, that was one of his hallmark justice legislations: to ban certain breeds of dogs.

Interjections.

Mr. Hudak: I hear a lot of members now suddenly talking about MPAC and assessments, but I haven't heard one of them yet stand in the House and justify schedule A of the act.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): We actually believe in current value assessment.

Mr. Hudak: The member says, "We actually believe in current value assessment," and I guess is satisfied with schedule A of the act. If the member actually believes in current value assessment in the pure form, then I expect him to vote against this act because there's actually an assessment freeze, which takes you away from current value assessment. This is the direct opposite of what the member from Mississauga is suggesting.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): You have nerve.

Mr. Hudak: Well, it would take nerve for the members of the Liberal caucus to stand up in the House and talk about this, because not a single one has had the courage to get up and say, "Yes, we are freezing assessments until conveniently after the next election. But if Dalton McGuinty is re-elected, we will then hit you with three years of assessments all at once." If you think of some of the seniors on fixed incomes who may have a modest home and a fixed income and who have experienced skyrocketing property assessments, well, you ain't seen nothing yet. If this bill were to pass and Dalton McGuinty were re-elected, you would see three years of assessment increases hitting simultaneously, with no protections for these taxpayers whatsoever.

The Speaker will know that I, as the opposition critic, had brought forward the Homestead Act. The Homestead Act had a number of powerful protections for taxpayers, including capping assessment increases at 5% per year, as long as home ownership was maintained.

Mr. Delaney: You're subsidizing the rich.

Mr. Hudak: The member for Mississauga says, "You're subsidizing the rich." Well, if there's a senior citizen—a widow—on a fixed income who has paid for a home and who sees her assessments going up 20%, 30%, 40% per year, as I know he has seen in his constituency office no doubt, my bill would protect them. My colleague describes that as subsidizing the rich. I think it is simply rewarding the value of home ownership and helping seniors stay in their homes, instead of having to sell them, which schedule A of the act will do beginning in 2009.

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As a matter of fact, I need to remind my colleagues that the vast majority of the Liberal members actually rose in the House and supported the Homestead Act. I think the member from Oakville was one of those who supported the Homestead Act upon second reading. Unfortunately, the government has refused to call that act for third reading. I would suggest that if they had the guts to do so, it would pass. I know that my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative caucus are supportive, we've had the support of the New Democrat caucus on second reading, and there were a number of Liberal members who stood up to the Premier and the finance minister at the time to say that they disagreed.

You will recall that the finance minister at the time, Mr. Duncan, rejected the act and the Premier rejected the act. They were against it. Nonetheless, because of the outcry of taxpayers in communities across the province, we did succeed in getting a number of Liberal members to support it, hence it passed on second reading.

Another powerful protection in the Homestead Act, you will recall, is that it would allow up to \$25,000 in home repairs to take place without triggering another assessment. The third aspect was modest but helpful property tax breaks for seniors and the disabled, which effectively meant that the first \$10,000 of the home's value would not face property tax. There would be an

exemption for the first \$10,000, which give a modest but valuable tax break to those individuals.

With those powerful protections for taxpayers, the Homestead Act carried on second reading. I regret that the government has not called it for the third reading vote. I still hold out some mild hope that they will before the end of this session. Nonetheless, we had brought forward in committee a number of amendments that had similar principles to the Homestead Act because we are worried about the triple whammy of assessment increases that Dalton McGuinty has sneakily scheduled for after the next election. They were at a 5% cap, as I had suggested in the Homestead Act. Also, if the government didn't like 5%, if they liked 4% or 6% or something like that, another amendment gave them the ability through the Lieutenant Governor in Council to set that cap rate. Nonetheless, caps would prevail at whatever level the government of the day thought was appropriate. Unfortunately, despite the fact that Liberal members supported the Homestead Act at second reading, they shot it down at the committee and those amendments failed to pass.

My colleague the member from Beaches–East York has done extensive work on assessment reform and has brought forward his own suggestions for debate as well. He should be commended for that hard work. We don't have the exact same approaches, but similar principles to give protection in support of the value of home ownership in an era of skyrocketing assessments. My colleague from Beaches–East York will probably use some time during his remarks to discuss this. I did appreciate the fact that he did support our motions because they're based on similar principles. Unfortunately, Liberal members as one voted them down.

We as well had considerable debate on schedule D, which would bring in CPAB, an entity that exists but for the first time will have standing in the laws of the province of Ontario. We had a number of groups, including the Ontario Bar Association, which suggested that there need to be greater provisions to protect solicitor-client privilege. We listened and appreciated the response of the civil servants at the ministry who attempted to address some of the concerns. Ultimately, though, I and Mr. Barrett, who was my colleague at committee, felt that they did not go far enough in trying to protect solicitor-client privilege under schedule D of the Canadian Public Accountability Board Act. We voted against the amendments the government had brought forward. The opposition did bring forward its own amendments, which we believe would have allowed CPAB to do its important work in checking closely audit firms who function in the province of Ontario, while achieving the balance of protecting the solicitor-client privilege. Unfortunately, though, our amendment to that section of the act was rejected by the government members.

We also expressed concern—I'm jumping ahead to schedule L—about the fact that the government now was proposing to tax ethanol in Ontario. I believe that there has been, over the last number of years, some consensus among parties here in the Ontario Legislature on the

value of ethanol in gasoline as an environmental measure. We had moved in that direction. The current government is similarly moving in that direction. Both the previous Harris and Eves governments and the McGuinty government are making investments in ethanol production.

What's puzzling and seems to run against current practice, however, is that the McGuinty government has decided to tax ethanol—to tax it at the exact same rate, if I followed the bill appropriately, as gasoline is taxed. Certainly, if you're trying to encourage an environmental initiative through a market mechanism, it runs against the grain to put a higher tax on it. The Speaker well knows that if you tax something, you'll end up with less of it at the end of the day. So we had brought forward this concern. There seemed to be some government members who didn't fully realize that the McGuinty government, in its appetite for higher taxes, was proposing taxing ethanol. So we had brought forward—and I appreciate the support of my colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk, Mr. Barrett, on this to ensure that ethanol remained exempt from taxation when mixed with gasoline, but, sadly, the government members chose to vote in favour of taxing ethanol.

We had suggested that the ethanol growth fund could simply be supported through the consolidated revenue fund. There is no mandate that says you'd have to tax ethanol in order to support an ethanol growth fund, so we rejected the notion that it would be appropriate to increase taxes on gasoline and increase taxes on ethanol, as it does in schedule L.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): Why would we subsidize foreign ethanol?

Mr. Hudak: The Minister of Labour asks a question. But you're taxing all ethanol, no matter where it's created. If it's domestic ethanol, it would be subject to tax.

Hon. Mr. Peters: Right now, foreign ethanol is coming into this province tax-free.

Mr. Hudak: But I guess what I'm saying to the minister—and hopefully this will help and maybe he'll vote against the bill; I know he's concerned about it because of the riding he represents—is that schedule L of the bill, if passed, will mean that ethanol, no matter where it's manufactured, will be subject to full tax as if it were gasoline. This runs against the grain of what previous Conservative governments have done and what the McGuinty government had done its first couple of years, strangely, in schedule L. Maybe it's just a habit: In each bill that they bring forward, they have to have a tax increase of some kind. Unfortunately, this one will be a tax increase on ethanol.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: When schedule N—I didn't even mean the pun, actually. Thank you. That comes from the powerhouse member, by the way, for Hamilton East—and a very nice column recently by Andrew Dreschel in the Spectator, for those following along at home.

Schedule N opened up the so-called health tax. We all know that's just a name; it's an income tax increase on the backs of seniors and working families. We took that opportunity to put forward an amendment that would eliminate the Dalton McGuinty income tax increases. John Tory has committed to doing so within the first mandate of the John Tory government. We had suggested this, but the McGuinty government continues to prefer tax increases as opposed to tax reductions and were not supportive of the elimination of the Dalton McGuinty income tax increases by December 31, 2011.

I had also brought forward some suggestions with respect to the proposed changes to the LCBO. There is an important role that the chair of the LCBO plays in ensuring that the LCBO achieves the right balance in what can sometimes be two competing mandates. They don't always compete, but sometimes they do.

There's no doubt the LCBO has been charged with the responsibility of maximizing revenue to the province of Ontario. When you see a government of this nature that likes to spend and spend and spend, they've definitely taken the whip out and told the LCBO to increase revenues substantially to help fill that appetite.

The other mandate that the LCBO has, quite frankly, in my view, is to support domestic production, particularly supporting small businesses like our craft wineries in the province of Ontario, our microbreweries, for example, and those in the spirits industry that employ a lot of Ontario residents.

I think it's important for the LCBO to try to maintain that balance of supporting a domestic industry as opposed to always going for the highest rate of return. We all know that there's a significant wine glut, for example, in parts of Europe and parts of Australia. There are organizations that are funded through European or Australian tax dollars to help promote these products in markets like the province of Ontario. I think we need to be very, very careful about accepting those dollars in order to pad the bottom line at the LCBO in these types of promotions at the expense of our domestic industry.

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Therefore, I have a significant number of qualms with the notion that this bill has of reducing the role of the chair and creating a new high-paid position in the administration at the LCBO. We've brought forward concerns already with a number of the agencies under the government's control and ownership, and I worry that the LCBO may forget about its mandate to support domestic industry in order to generate greater revenue for the government's spending proclivities.

I had brought forward an amendment to reject the notion of downsizing the role of the chair. Unfortunately, I lost that argument in committee, and the government seems to be down that path. I think Andy Brandt as chair had done a very strong job. It was a pleasure to work with Andy, who, we should note, is a rare individual in that he worked for three different governments, three different political parties, which I think showed the respect that people had for him. People aren't always

happy with the chair's decisions at the end of the day, but I believe that Mr. Brandt—in his heart we saw evidence of it—wanted to ensure that balance was achieved between revenue and supporting domestic industries. When you take away the role of the chair to keep the pressure on, so to speak, I worry that we will lose sight of the importance of the domestic industry and had hoped that they would not go forward with schedule Q.

The minister, currently the Minister of Public Infrastructure and Renewal—the LCBO has had various masters under the McGuinty government, has been moved around on a couple of occasions—is also taking it upon himself or herself, as the case may be, to set the pay rates for those who are outside of the collective bargaining unit. The current schedule Q, for example, would state that the board may appoint staff “subject to the approval of the Lieutenant Governor” previously, but salary ranges and conditions of employment of officers, inspectors, employees etc. who are not members of the bargaining unit must be approved by the minister, rather than the Lieutenant Governor. I reject that approach. I think it's important that cabinet, as a level of sober second thought—not to use another pun there when we talk about the LCBO—would say, “Is the minister making the appropriate decision?” if he or she were proposing that the administrators outside of the collective bargaining unit would have an increase in their wages or their incentives or their benefits.

Any minister will have a close working relationship with the chairs and CEOs of the agencies underneath them. I think proposals should be taken back to cabinet for final approval. Just by way of example, if the minister had decided the new CEO position, in order to have the best-qualified individual, should have an increase of 10% in pay, I think the minister should make that case at cabinet, for cabinet approval, rather than making it of his or her own volition. We had brought forward an amendment to change that, but unfortunately that amendment failed to pass as well.

I know when you have a bill of this length amending this many acts, you never really have enough time to address all aspects of the act. I have tried to highlight a number of our concerns, but we will watch closely in the time ahead to see how others develop. I know the minister and his staff will be looking at the next wave of budget bills or finance legislation. I will take this time to give some advice to them. Working families and seniors are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. We're seeing higher taxes, higher user fees, higher utility rates and not the increase in income to keep pace. I do hope that this government will move forward with tax reductions to help in those areas.

Secondly, the flight of well-paying manufacturing jobs has now reached an alarming rate. We have not seen a strategy by this government to recover those manufacturing jobs. I know my colleague for Waterloo–Wellington had just brought forward an important motion in the assembly that passed, during private members' business,

to try to address the loss of manufacturing jobs in the economic decline in Ontario. I hope the government will now follow what the member for Waterloo–Wellington brought forward in his motion.

Lastly, I hope the government can be more clear—maybe the parliamentary assistant will be in his remarks—with respect to matching the proposed income splitting for pension income. I've asked the question twice in the House but have not yet received a clear answer whether the government would pass on the savings to taxpayers or try to claw them back.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I listened intently to the member from Erie–Lincoln, who spoke before me. We're going to touch on many of the same aspects, but not exactly in the same way, because he and I are obviously with different parties and see the world from very different viewpoints. But much of what he had to say had a certain ring of truth about it, in terms that he earmarked some of the problematic sections of this particular bill.

I listened intently as well, before that, to the Minister of Finance. He, I think tongue-in-cheek, told all parties to pass this bill expeditiously, as if we had a choice. This bill, of course, is subject to a closure motion. The debate is confined to one day, and that day is today. I think that at about 10 to 6 or at 6 o'clock the vote will be called, although I understand it may be put over to another time.

This is a huge bill. It has so many sections. And with all the sections in the bill, this government, in its wisdom, invoked closure. They confined the committee process to a morning of two hours and an afternoon of two hours. In the morning we got to hear some eight or nine deputants. We heard from many cities, from home-building groups and from a few others who were able to squeeze into that very short time frame. In the afternoon, with closure invoked even on the committee process, we worked our way through some of the amendments that were put forward. In the end, in the last half hour or so, we literally dealt without debate with everything that was to be done. I did not, nor do I, hold out much hope for this bill, nor did I hold out much hope for the committee process, that actual changes could have been made.

There are three areas—maybe four, if time permits—that I need to key in on what is contained in this bill and why what is contained in this bill is not going to be beneficial to the people of Ontario.

The first one, hidden in schedule A, is the great Liberal election hope: the property tax freeze. It's hidden in here. The minister has not spoken about it. I don't know whether the parliamentary assistant will speak about this great Liberal hope. This is like the ostrich putting its head in the sand: the great hope that if you don't do anything about it, if you hide from it, if you don't say anything about it, after two years it may just go away. But this great hope, this ostrich in the sand, this two years to study the proposals of MPAC and of the Ombudsman conveniently takes you to a couple of months after that famous day—October 4, 2007—that

politicians both look forward to and dread, being election day.

The Liberals are hoping, by passage of this bill, to do absolutely nothing for two years and hope this does not surface as an election issue. If it does, they can say, "What's your beef? We froze your taxes." But the reality at the end of this do-nothing period of Liberal intransigence on what is a very contentious issue out on the streets of Ontario is potentially to put people at risk of not one year of increases, not two years of increases but three years of increases as properties in certain sections of certain cities and properties in certain parts of the province escalate in value faster than in other places.

This is a do-nothing policy until after the next election—

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): Wasn't it your suggestion to delay it indefinitely?

Mr. Prue: —that I think the member from Essex wants to talk about it, but I don't think his party will let him.

Mr. Crozier: Your suggestion was to delay it indefinitely.

Mr. Prue: Oh, no. Never would I do such a thing as he suggests: delay it indefinitely. You see, their policy is to do nothing for two years and then potentially resurrect it after they hope to be safely re-elected.

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On the contrary, the New Democratic Party—I shouldn't say "the party," because the party has not yet decided. But the leader of the party did ask me to chair a task force, to travel across the province to hear from ordinary people, to study taxes and to look at what possible solutions there were. We did not have the ostrich mentality. We did not go and bury our heads in the sand. We did not say, "Wait and find out in two years, and after the election, what we might do or what we might say." In fact, we prepared a report. That report outlines seven different things that need to be done in order for property taxes to be fair, for them to work for all Ontarians. We're not saying that we're going to freeze taxes for two years and do nothing about it, to study for two years the 22 recommendations that were made by the Ombudsman about MPAC, because there is absolutely no study that is needed on those 22 recommendations.

If I could talk about those 22 recommendations just for a minute, at the time they were made by the Ombudsman, the Minister of Finance stood up in his place and said that 17 of them were already approved, were already going to be dealt with, which left only five. Of those five, two are related to MPAC itself and the other ones are government programs that are very marginal. Of the two that are contentious, that I suppose are going to take two years to study, number one is whether or not there should be a reverse onus. The onus right now is on a person who owns property, when they are challenging MPAC's decision on the value of their property, to prove that MPAC is wrong. All the Ombudsman said is that we should adopt a system that has already been adopted in Manitoba, where their equivalent of MPAC has to prove

that they are right, so that the ordinary taxpayer doesn't have the whole burden of proof, coming up against lawyers and governments and bureaucracy and computer systems, like they do in Ontario. All the lawyers and government and bureaucratic systems have to prove to the contrary, that they are not wrong and that the taxpayer—that's a pretty simple thing, and we think that needs to be adopted.

The other one is whether or not MPAC has to divulge its proprietary secrets, its computer plan and how it works. The Ombudsman said that they need to do that so that it can be clear and transparent to ordinary taxpayers what is happening. We think that needs to be done, and no government needs to study that for two years. Clearly, every government should want its citizens, its citizenry, to know what is contained within government bills, government procedures, government programs. The light needs to shine. I heard I don't know how many times today in question period that the light needs to shine. But this is a government obviously, on this issue at least—

Ms. Horwath: On most issues.

Mr. Prue: On most issues, yes—that does not want the light to shine until it is advantageous for them or after which they cannot be held to account.

We also went on in our program to talk about the need for tenants to be protected, because tenants quite often pay far more in property taxes through their rent, as a proportion of what the value of their homes is, than people who live in houses. We also want to look at business property taxes, whether they are too high and whether they can be reduced. The education portion of taxes that are paid, for example, in the city of Toronto is out of whack with the education portions in other parts of the province.

We want to look at seasonal rates. We say that government should be looking—or at least I have said or suggested to my party that we should be looking at the seasonal rates that cottagers have to pay in much of Ontario when they do not get value for their taxes. Where they do not have roads ploughed in the winter or do not have garbage pickup in many places, where their kids are not eligible to go to school, where they do not get the full range of municipal services, we need to look to see whether or not taxing them at the full rate of someone who lives there year-round and has access to all of the services is fair. We've given alternatives for municipalities to look at.

We've looked at the whole thing about rebating to seniors, a fair rebate program, not necessarily that all people get it but that those seniors, those disabled and those on fixed incomes who most need the help, would get it. We think that's an important thing to look at.

We're looking at encouraging people to renovate and fix up their homes. We have a \$40,000 homestead provision that is absolutely essential to allow people to upgrade their homes without fear that, in upgrading them, their taxes will go up. We've modelled this after some of the programs in the United States. Perhaps the two most contentious issues, to members opposite—maybe the first

one is that we have advocated that assessments on properties be frozen until the time of sale.

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: Perhaps this is what the member from Essex is nattering on about. This is done in most of Europe. It is done in some states in the United States and seems—

Mr. Crozier: It's wacky.

Mr. Prue: He thinks it's a wacky idea. The wacky idea is to do nothing.

Mr. Crozier: What a wack.

Mr. Prue: No, it's no wack. There is no wack at all. It is done throughout the world and is quite commonplace in Europe, and it works far better.

The month of October, which is Halloween month, is when you think, "Oh my God, I'm going to be scared by little ghosts and goblins coming to my door." Actually, the most frightening thing that most people who own property in Ontario get in October is the MPAC report telling them how much their property has gone up and how much they are likely to be taxed as a result of that. That is the most frightful thing people get each and every October. We want to take the volatility out, and we believe the volatility can be taken out.

Last but not least, this government has done a very shoddy job. They keep talking about being around the edges, but what needs to be done is to upload the download. The previous government downloaded everything to the municipalities. I tell you that this \$3.2 billion that AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, has said is improperly downloaded ought not to be on the property tax. I have recommended, through the committee, that that should be uploaded and that it should take no longer than eight to 10 years. We think it is doable, over time; that all that money, \$3.2 billion, needs to be taken off the property tax. If it were, property taxes might be reflective of what they are supposed to do: pay for local services such as roads, sewers, water, police and fire departments, libraries and everything else that a municipality is supposed to do, and not things they are not supposed to do, like public housing and welfare, and what they are not supposed to do in terms of public health, and what they are not supposed to do in terms of day care services, and what they are not supposed to do in terms of land ambulance and air ambulance. All those things ought not to be paid for by the property tax. Those things need to be discussed.

But what does this bill do instead? This bill hides it all away. This bill says we're going to do nothing about it. We're going to study it. We're going to set up a website. We're going to do whatever we're going to do, and we're going to make sure that no decision and no discussion whatsoever take place until that magic day six months after the next provincial election.

I do have to give the Conservatives and Mr. Hudak from Erie-Lincoln some credit. He has put forward his own ideas. I do not necessarily agree with those ideas. He is talking about a 5% cap that would be indefinite. We do not believe that a 5% cap will work; we studied that. That

is what has happened in California over a number of years, although it's 2% and not 5%. I tell you that there were some problems inherent in that. We looked at it. It is a possibility. At least it is an idea. At least it's better than doing absolutely nothing.

He also used a \$25,000 homestead improvement provision and wanted to give disabled and seniors a \$10,000 reduction on the assessment of their houses. We don't agree with that provision, but at least he is thinking about it; at least he is putting forward some ideas. Would that the government did so. Instead, this government chooses in this particular bill, buried deep in schedule A, to put in a freeze until after the next election. Some solution.

I then went on to schedule L, which is the gas tax on ethanol. This from a government that says it is concerned with the environment; this from a government, or a Liberal Party, that says they want to be a green party, that just federally elected a new leader who is supposedly a green candidate. This is a party that wants to tax ethanol at the same rate as gasoline. This is a party that wants to tax something which costs more money to produce—i.e., ethanol—than gasoline, thus rendering it more difficult and perhaps impossible for ethanol to compete in the same way petroleum-based products like gasoline already compete. If you're going to tax them at the same rate and you know that at the current time with current technologies it costs more to produce ethanol than gasoline, then I have some very real doubts about whether this government is committed to the greening of our environment, to the use of ethanol, and to getting rid of our dependence on gasoline and petroleum-based products.

1700

This past spring, at my own expense, I went to a country I had never visited before on my vacation: Brazil. I was quite impressed with the Brazilian economy and how they have got around their dependency on gasoline. Brazil has almost no natural oil reserves in a very large country, the fifth-largest country in the world, and they import literally all of their gasoline and petroleum products.

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: Even in that country, they have decided that they are going to use ethanol, and they have gone into it in a really big way. It is a much warmer country than ours, and so the percentage of ethanol that they can put into their gasoline is of course a higher proportion than would likely work in the wintertime in Canada. They use something like a 40-60 split, with 40% being ethanol and 60% being gasoline. I found the cost of automobile fuel in that country to be quite favourable with that in Canada; it was about the same price and perhaps slightly less than what we pay per litre in Canada. They know that they have non-existent resources, but they are also smart enough to know that the world has depleting resources, and they are putting their energies into ethanol production and are not taxing it beyond people's ability to pay. They know that they need to do it. Unfortunately, I don't believe this government has done anything of that type.

We need cost-effective alternatives and we should all the time be looking for cost-effective alternatives to pollution, to depletion of our natural gas reserves, to depletion of our oil and gas reserves, our coal reserves and every other reserve that we have on this planet. We need to do it cleaner, we need to do it more effectively and we need to make those resources last, because once they're gone, they're gone. And I don't see that this particular section in this particular bill is going to do anything to help promote the use of ethanol. It is going to make it cost-prohibitive and it's going to make sure, of course, that this government has more money.

I listened to the Minister of Labour and his comment when he was yelling back and forth saying that it's all imported. Well, perhaps at this point much of the ethanol production is imported. But we're under a free trade agreement, if the Liberals haven't forgotten that, and the stuff passes back and forth. And when and if our ethanol production actually gets going, it will pass freely across the border as well. I don't think this is a particularly good argument for the Minister of Labour to have been making.

I'd like to deviate just for a moment, if I could, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, about a wonderful event I attended last week in my own riding of Beaches-East York, and which I saw in the *Globe and Mail* just a couple of days ago—perhaps it was the *Toronto Star*. It talked about Mr. Alex Winch, Mondial developments and the Cecilia Murphy building at 11 Coatsworth Avenue, and how the tenants and the owners of that building, Senior Link, have worked with Mondial and actually put in a system which heats the hot water by a combination of glycol—they heat the water and then have to use less natural gas. This is entirely without subsidy from the province of Ontario. Mr. Winch told me that he got not one penny when he requested anything from the province of Ontario, even though this is going to save tremendous amounts of natural gas reserves. The people in this particular building are going to use the hot water heated by glycol, by the sun's energy, through rotating hot water through solar panels. The cost to the building will be identical to what it would have been to use natural gas.

What I'm trying to get at is that this was done by a private individual and it's being done at the same cost as natural gas, but this government seems not to have been even the slightest bit interested in helping finance it, in working with Mondial, in working with some of the other projects they want to do in Toronto. I guess they just want to spend the money on natural gas.

I'm only going to talk about one other aspect, because I want to leave some time for my colleague from Hamilton East, who also wishes to speak to this. The last aspect I wish to speak to—the third one—is the provision in Z.2. This involves the unincorporated territories in Ontario; these are mostly in northern Ontario, although some of them will be found in central Ontario. These are places that have not been incorporated—that do not have towns, villages, cities or counties—where people often live. Not a lot of people live there. Until this time, they

have not had to pay municipal taxes. They've not had to pay municipal taxes for good reason, because the majority of these places, the majority of these homes, the majority of people who live in these homes, do not receive any municipal services. In a place like Toronto, Ottawa, North Bay, Thornhill—I'm looking at members opposite—London or all the places you come from and all the farming communities or cities or towns, you can expect that your taxes pay for roads, sewers, libraries, water, sidewalks, police, parks, fire services, social services, planning, health, garbage and everything else that the town, village, city, county, regional government—whatever place you happen to live in, they do all of these things. But if you live in an unincorporated territory, if you live where there are no towns or villages or people—you simply have a house—you do not get any of those services.

But along comes Z.2—and this, I think, is one of the strangest tax grabs in the history of this province. In 1776 in the United States, the people rebelled because the king, who was far away, King George, decided to impose taxes. The rallying cry was, "No taxation without representation." The people were arguing that if they were going to pay taxes, they needed to have local representatives and the services that would derive from those taxes. When they weren't getting those and all the moneys were flowing back to the king in England, the people rebelled.

Today we have King Greg. Through Z.2—I invite all members to look at it—King Greg, the finance minister in the province of Ontario, can now levy taxes in all the unincorporated areas and charge them whatever tax rate he wants, on his own volition, not through the Legislature, not through the committee, not even through cabinet; this is all going to be done by ministerial fiat. King Greg can charge and levy a property tax under the Assessment Act, and there is no way around it.

So if you live in an unincorporated area and you don't receive any municipal services whatsoever, the Minister of Finance can levy a tax on your property—and will, I tell you, levy a tax on your property—as if you got those services, if we pass this bill today. The money will not flow to the municipality, because there isn't one. The money will flow to the province of Ontario and be used as part of general revenue. That's where the money will go. The money will come to the province of Ontario and not to the municipality, because, of course, there isn't one.

I would think the people in northern Ontario and in these unincorporated territories, who do not get any service, who do not have any vote and who do not have any municipality to which they can go, will be very resentful of King Greg, just as the people 230 years ago in 1776 were resentful of King George. I think people in those unincorporated territories are going to have a new king whom they're going to be resentful of. I'm looking forward to what they have to say—they probably don't know much about this—come the next election when they find out for the first time that their property is being

taxed for services they can never expect to get. They'll be paying for roads, sewers and water; they'll be paying for police and fire departments; they'll be paying for every service that most of us take for granted. There won't be any services like that for them, but they'll be taxed anyway. King Greg will be responsible for that and so will the members here in the Liberal caucus when they—I'm sure—vote for this bill when it comes up for a vote sometime either later today or tomorrow. Remember what you're voting for, because it's right here.

I promised to leave my colleague from Hamilton East a few minutes. I see I have just under 12 minutes left, so I'm going to cede the floor to my colleague from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge because I'd really like to hear the government's defence of these three aspects, plus whatever else is in the legislation: how they can justify not having a policy, no policy at all, on assessments on properties and waiting for three years; how they can justify Z.2 with the unincorporated territories; how they can justify forcing people to pay the same taxes on ethanol as on gasoline when we know that we need to go down that road and that we need to make it cheaper so it's cost-effective. I don't know how they can, but I'm looking forward to hearing my good friend from Pickering talk about that. With that, I will cede the floor.

1710

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I look forward to the opportunity to enter into the debate this afternoon on Bill 151 during third reading. Since this is not the normal bill debate structure where we have questions and comments, I won't lead off my comments by responding to the member from Beaches-East York on his three very specific points, but I may or may not touch upon some of them during the time allocated to me.

It gives me pleasure, though, to be able to rise in the House today and participate in this particular debate around Bill 151. I've had the unique pleasure during my time here to have served not once but twice with Minister Sorbara. I had the opportunity starting at the end of June 2005 to move from a parliamentary assistant's role with Minister Phillips over to finance with Minister Sorbara. As he indicated, shortly after that, he chose a self-imposed sabbatical from that role. Fortunately, he's back. It certainly was unnecessary for a particular reason, but he did the right, responsible and honourable thing at that point in time until such time as he was able to return to that role, the Premier making a wise and judicious decision to return him to the role he fills so effectively here in this Legislature. I also had the opportunity in the interim to serve with Minister Duncan as he prepared this particular budget and had the opportunity to have some input on the budget process earlier on that was delivered this past spring before the return of Mr. Sorbara, and I was honoured to have that opportunity as well.

This particular budget measures bill, the fall budget bill, gives us an opportunity to deliver on some of those commitments that were made during the budget and that traditionally become encompassed in a bill of this nature as one moves through a fiscal year, since not everything

can be done, obviously, at the time of the budget, and the timing in this place doesn't necessarily allow for a variety of measures to be put in place instantaneously. The budget certainly lays out a framework, but this bill allows for a lot of that to be approved, ideally, by the Legislature and then subsequently implemented by the public service and those who have the responsibility for the distribution of provincial dollars once they're transferred to them, as often is the case, whether it's education, social services or health, as the case might be.

We had a chance last night—it seems to be finance week—to deal with the supply motion and had the opportunity to speak to that, as others did, and the need to ensure that the business of government goes on and also an opportunity then—and I want to do the same thing today—to celebrate and thank the staff, the folks who work for the province, both internally within the assembly here and within all the ministries, for the good work they do and continue to do in helping to develop this particular legislation. Certainly, it couldn't be done by political staffers alone. They can provide insights into what's needed, the decision-making by the minister, but we certainly need the expertise and good work and long hours put in by the bureaucracy in developing and formalizing the legislation and making sure that it works.

The member from Erie-Lincoln spoke about our budget process and complimented the staff, legislative counsel in particular, in assisting them in the drafting of amendments during that process of debate as it was ongoing.

Bill 151 allows us to continue this steady progress that we've been making since the fall of 2003 in strengthening the province, in building where we can on its economy, in encouraging, supporting and leveraging private sector investment as one way to build the economy. I heard members opposite talking earlier about manufacturing jobs and the current state of the manufacturing economy, but they didn't speak to it in the broadest context, where it's an issue across North America, if not internationally, that we're in yet another changing economic environment. We have to, as a province, stay ahead of that curve in part, but also to recognize the strong manufacturing base that exists here in the province.

That's why during our first budget we included the auto strategy and a commitment to some \$500 million under then-Minister Joe Cordiano to support and leverage the private sector auto industry in this province, and it's why we continue again this year to lead—I believe we're the top jurisdiction in North America, ahead of Michigan, in auto development. Our investment in that, as a portion of the dollars that are being expended by the likes of General Motors, Ford and DaimlerChrysler, the Big Three traditional North American automakers, has assisted them in being able to have the confidence in this jurisdiction to continue and expand development opportunities and plan for the future. This was not investment in putting a new widget on the line; this was investment in research and development of new product, new strategies and new ways of them doing their business, not

only today but certainly in the years ahead, so we can stay ahead of the curve in the auto sector. The absence of that type of investment, in my view, could very well have meant the loss of significant jobs in the province well beyond those that we've seen as the result of the general manufacturing decline.

I want to do a little more about Bill 151, if passed, and those investments in Ontario and how we're building on accomplishments. As I said, we've made some steady progress along the way. During the second reading debate I had the opportunity to talk more about the measures that arise from the bill that Minister Duncan presented in March of this year and spoke then about the infrastructure nature of this particular legislation, of this budget. Minister Sorbara, in his comments, spoke about how we continue to deal with some key deficit areas that were part and parcel of what we found when we came to government. We certainly found a fiscal deficit, and we're working through that over time. We also found some other things, and we have taken strategic positionings on each of those in each of the subsequent budget years, including this, which is also reflected in this budget measures bill.

Certainly in that first budget, health was a primary focus. To meet the health needs in the province of Ontario and move us forward to where we need and should be, it required the imposition of a new tax. That tax is being reinvested above and beyond all the other dollars in health care in the province of Ontario. It was a significant deficit and we're making clear progress on that, whether it's anything from reductions in wait times to new physicians to new university opportunities, a new medical school, the establishment of family health teams, or the structures of the local integrated health networks that are now getting up and running so that communities—although it be broad communities; not local neighbourhoods, but broad communities—have the chance, the opportunity and the financial responsibility to make decisions about health care within these broader communities, these broader networks. That process is ongoing.

1720

In our second budget, the opportunity then presented itself to deal with education in a more focused fashion. The Rae report: I want to thank Bob Rae for his work in doing that at the behest of the Premier, for delivering to us a report that focused our attention on post-secondary education and training, some \$6.2 billion in planned expenditures over and above what's currently there, as a way to meet the needs of a new economy and another generation of opportunity, not simply continuing doing the same or putting a one-off band-aid on an issue. We chose instead to make a very comprehensive commitment to post-secondary education for those who are currently there, for those who will be there shortly, but more importantly, so that all of those folks and those young people—or adults—who are about to follow will contribute to a new economy in the years ahead.

As Minister Sorbara made reference to, in this past budget Minister Duncan, in his capacity at the time as Minister of Finance, chose to focus our attention on

infrastructure in the province. Clearly, there was a huge infrastructure deficit, not unlike the other deficits. He put his attention to that, for two principal reasons, in my view. One is because there was an immediate need, an immediately identifiable need that we had to address. That, again, was to build partnerships and leverage some quick activity as well as to keep the momentum going on infrastructure. During the course of the budget, there was a \$400-million allocation to municipalities on a one-time-only basis for the likes of road building. Those monies were available to them in this budget year so there would be economic activity in their communities, but also as a signal of how strongly we feel infrastructure redevelopment—and new development—is. We wanted our municipal partners to engage in that as quickly as possible, and the way to do that was to partner with them. In this case it wasn't a COMRIF-type application that has a longer process and has to be vetted because there are multiple partners. This was a one-time-only investment in municipalities for them to invest in their communities with the confidence and the knowledge that they would use those monies in a wise and judicious fashion, as they have done.

Clearly, the transportation and transit part of the agenda has been important to us this year, whether it's the commitment to the subway in Toronto through to York region, spanning the 416 area code into the 905 area code—a first-ever endeavour. Those monies are being set aside in trust as we await a couple of other things to happen, not the least of which is for our counterparts in Ottawa to firmly commit to that agenda. I think we all believe that will ultimately be the case as they work through their own decision-making, but we're confident that the federal finance minister, who sat in this Legislature for some time as a provincial finance minister in the last government, understands what the needs are in the greater Toronto area, the Golden Horseshoe area, and how important the economy of this area is and how important the development of a subway system as a way to move people effectively and efficiently and develop along a subway line is to the health and the economy of the great area in which we live. We're confident he'll be there to do that with us.

We're also providing positions within the Budget Measures Act that will help the municipalities of York and Toronto to achieve those ends. There are some very specific provisions that deal with development charges bylaws that are in the legislation, as well as tax incentive zones within the legislation, that will assist those jurisdictions in planning for the development of and financing and supporting the development of that much-needed piece of infrastructure, one that has been long awaited. Certainly, the many thousands, tens of thousands of students who attend York University, at the very least, among others, will find that to be a valuable asset in the future as it unfolds. Nonetheless, the money is being set aside. The provincial money is on the table. It's not a wish list type of endeavour. We're sure that that's a strong enough signal to our federal counterparts to also engage in that.

We've certainly been dealing with the fiscal situation, health and the education and infrastructure part of what's happening in the province of Ontario, but this particular piece of legislation doesn't deal with just those things. It deals with a variety, a number of measures that are much broader, that reflect more effectively on the broader economy of the province and the needs of the citizens of this great province.

As a matter of fact, my view is that we have so much good news in the budget that we couldn't possibly propose it all in one bill. That's why we have to be back here today with Bill 151, because there's just more good news that we wanted to ensure that the people of the province of Ontario have the opportunity to share in. Constituents throughout Ontario will benefit from the bill, not just a few but many.

In this legislation, there are proposals for changes to the Corporations Tax Act that are going to allow for corporate entities who are making donations, either charitable or donations regarding ecologically sensitive lands, to be able to see some capital gains exemption. It's a strategy to find means by which people can invest in charitable causes, can be philanthropic in a corporate way that will benefit those in the community. Most often, those philanthropic initiatives benefit those who are maybe in a less prestigious position, who need to have some support. We can't do it all as government, but we can find ways to leverage that as well. Clearly, at a time when the environment is becoming a matter of increasing interest to the people of Ontario—I'd suggest across the country—the capacity to donate ecologically sensitive lands and get some capital tax benefit from that will encourage corporate entities to engage in that.

I was saying to some folks over the weekend, while I was in Montreal as well as elsewhere, as we watched the leadership of the federal Liberal Party unfold, that I was watching the municipal elections with interest. I noticed the changes that did occur, particularly in the broader jurisdiction that I'm more familiar with around the Golden Horseshoe, the greater Toronto area in particular. The changes that occurred in some of those councils tended to lead to new candidates, new members of council who have a stronger interest in the environment than maybe the incumbents, a greater focus there, whether it was mayors or councillors.

I watched the outcome of the federal by-election in London, as I'm sure many of us did, and I saw the leader of the Green Party placing second in that particular race, clearly a strong indication from that community that the environment is on their political agenda. It's not just on their feel-good agenda. It's not just on their taking-the-recycling-out-to-the-curb agenda. It's on their political agenda on a policy front. This weekend, with the election by delegates on the floor—I must say the delegates spoke strongly on the floor, electing a new leader of the federal Liberal Party who is seen and known as a more green candidate, one who has a strong environmental bent.

As important, during the debates and during the discussion at that particular venue, there were two or three things that had delegates on their feet. In each case, when

the environment was being raised in speeches by all the candidates or during discussion, it had delegates on their feet. You heard clearly from across the country, let alone in this province, that people are engaging politically in that agenda. What might seem as simple as providing some capital gains benefit for ecologically sensitive land being turned over to government is a clear symbol of the types of things that the public wants to have happen, and we're responding to what we understand to be the public's agenda—not our agenda for them but their agenda, and how we effectively implement the agenda that they feel is important.

1730

We're proposing a number of other measures to create a more competitive and fair tax system. When Minister Sorbara spoke, he mentioned the digital tax media credit. It is to allow for more intensive media products to be eligible for tax credits and provide an enhanced credit for smaller corporations developing original pieces of media. We've heard from that part of the industry. We've heard about the growth going on in Ontario in the digital media industry. Clearly, places like Sheridan College have been leaders in the development of digital technology for media. It's important for us to continue to support what comes of that initiative, not just to support the post-secondary education but to find mechanisms, when there is success, to be able to support through a tax credit system those industries, those small industries, but yet those who are known across North America. Our province is the third-largest employer in this creative industries field after only California and New York within North America. That's an important place for us to be, and it's an important industry too for us to support, because with its growth this type of industry offsets, maybe only in a small way, some of the loss we'll see with a changing economy in manufacturing or elsewhere. But if we can grow industries that are forward-thinking, industries where new skill sets are needed, industries that are next-generation industries, it will augur well for the province for years and years to come.

So the digital media tax credit is just one of those little elements that affect a smaller portion of the overall provincial economy and a smaller portion of its overall employment base, but nonetheless one that's important because of its growth, one we want to encourage to see its growth continue. As a matter of fact, those industries in the province contribute almost \$10 billion to the economy when it's all in. It's not a small number, in spite of the fact that it might be seen as a relatively small industry. So that's just a little bit of some of the good news, I think, on the entertainment front in regard to this particular piece of legislation.

We haven't forgotten about seniors, those who are on fixed incomes and those particularly of more modest means, seniors who, in a lower income range, need to have our continued vigilance when activities are going on. We want to ensure that their contribution to the economy is not forgotten, because they have made the commitments to this province that allow us the opportunity to have and do what we do today. Without their con-

tribution over the last generations, you and I probably wouldn't have the opportunity to be here serving the people of Ontario in the way that we do.

Bill 151 is about fairness to lower-income senior couples in Ontario, and we've proposed some changes to the Income Tax Act that would ensure that seniors keep more of their income. We're proposing that we increase the income threshold for senior couples for the Ontario property and sales tax credit. So we wanted to make sure that, as they have some modest growth in their old age security, we're not clawing that back in some fashion by having their income threshold rise such that they're not eligible for tax credits. So we're making adjustments to that, and that will result in the seniors in Ontario, those low-income seniors in particular, having a few more dollars in their pocket at the end of each month for the purposes of their needs. As a matter of fact, if this piece of legislation is passed, that enhancement alone will leave some \$7 million in benefits available to some 220,000 senior couples in Ontario. Those are not huge dollars in the context of a provincial budget, but it means a lot to a low-income senior couples to know that the government of Ontario is considering their circumstance as it deals with the bigger issues within the province.

I know that some of the members opposite didn't support some earlier measures regarding seniors' property tax credits, but I'm hopeful today that in this particular piece of legislation they will see that as such a priority that they can find themselves in a position to be able to support Bill 151.

I want to make a few comments, in the couple of minutes that are remaining, about the process so far as this particular bill has moved through the Legislature. During second reading debate, some of the members of the official opposition spoke about the gas tax, and during debate here in third reading we talked a little bit about the ethanol situation. They tried to make an argument that, in their mind, we should be taxing ethanol. I don't know why we would want to do that at this point. I drive my car. I think if I have the privilege of being able to drive my vehicle, then I should be sharing not only my gas tax portion with municipalities—installed as of October 1, the final phase of the gas tax; two cents a litre in municipalities—but it would involve the obligation, then, to also ensure that a new ethanol industry in this province is supported. The taxation that's proposed within your gas-ethanol purchase will go toward the ethanol production fund, because we want to build an industry in which we can not only use ethanol locally but in which we also have the opportunity to sell ethanol outside of our own boundaries. We want it to be economically viable but also an economic growth opportunity as well.

We're confident that the inclusion of tax on ethanol included in gas is the appropriate and responsible thing to do. I'm sure those of us who have the opportunity to use our vehicles in that way will not object to ensuring that we grow that industry and support the industry. Otherwise, it means that those seniors I just talked about, as they pay their modest income tax, will be paying for

ethanol production, and I don't think that's the right thing to do. I don't think that a senior who's using the TTC, who's paying a modest amount of income tax, who has a low income, should also be expected, within that context, to be paying for me to drive my car because I don't want to pay the ethanol tax. I'd much rather pay that myself; I'm in a much better position to do that.

I see that we're just about running out of time. I'm optimistic that the members of the opposition as well as our own members will see that Bill 151 is clearly intended to enhance the lives of the people of the province of Ontario and that when the vote is called it will be unanimous.

Ms. Horwath: I'm pleased to have a chance to make a few remarks on the bill that's before us today.

During second reading debate of this bill, I was privileged to be able to sit in this place and listen to the comments that were coming from the government members, who in bringing this bill forward support it wholeheartedly, and the opposition members—the Conservatives and my own caucus colleagues—talking about some of the concerns that we have with the bill, because, of course, that's the way this place works. We try to enlighten each other with our various perspectives, and at the end of the day, the government will do what it does with its majority. That's the way it works.

I have to say, interestingly enough, that when I was reviewing the remarks of my friend from Beaches—East York, our critic in the area of finance—therefore, a budget bill falls under his portfolio—I got to chuckling, because I can recall him talking about how arcane this bill is and how it's 192 pages of very technical, very dry language and how it covered so many different areas and how he found it extremely difficult to get through. In fact, he even confessed to nodding off at his desk while he was reading the bill. I thought, well, good for you to admit that the bill is so dry in content that it doesn't keep you titillated, in terms of being engaged in the reading of it.

Having said that, my friend from Beaches—East York, as most members of this House would agree, certainly does his homework and does a good job of looking at the various pieces of legislation that he's required to review for us as critic, and he has come up with a number of significant issues that are at least noteworthy to be put forward.

I do have to say, though, that the one thing that we are very cognizant of in this debate this afternoon is that of course this is the last day of debate. There's no doubt about the fact that this is the last day of debate. The reason why it's the last day of the debate is because the government has invoked closure on the debate on this particular bill. What that means is that the government has decided that the bill has had enough debate, enough discussion, and it's time to get the bill passed through third reading and move on.

I can recall when I first got here about two and a half years ago and I went through my first experience of a closure bill—I think it was the actual budget bill back then—the House was just in an uproar about the govern-

ment having invoked closure on the debate. I, of course, was brand new. I had no idea what the heck that meant, as I was learning all the terms and trying to figure out the procedures of what goes on here. I still have a lot to learn. I don't think I'm quite an expert yet, and I probably won't be for quite some time. I have to thank the members and the various Speakers and the clerks who help me whenever I ask questions about procedural issues.

1740

Nonetheless, the reason why this side of the House had a bit of an uproar is because apparently when the current government was sitting on this side—in other words, in opposition—they uproariously complained about the previous government's habit of closing off debate for the purpose of moving bills along. So I find it kind of ironic every time I see closure motions come and I see bills being debated under a closure motion. That was one of my first recollections of being here and initially not understanding what all the uproar was about, and it was exactly because of the government's desire to close down debate on a bill.

I'm going to briefly talk about some of the issues, because I don't have very much time this afternoon, that have already been raised by our critic from Beaches–East York. I think it's important to reiterate them, because at the end of today, as you know, in about 10 or 15 minutes, that will be the end of the opportunity to say anything about Bill 151.

The first thing that members may recall being brought to light by our critic is the issue of the property tax freeze that is stuck inside this bill. Interestingly enough, I say “stuck inside this bill” because the bill is, as I indicated initially, quite long and quite detailed and affects a number of different pieces of legislation. In fact, it's considered a housekeeping bill—a bill that tidies up and messes about with a number of different things, but that doesn't have a huge, substantial rewriting of any particular piece of legislation or existing law in the province. So in this housekeeping bill, with all of these various little pieces, the one thing that was put in there by the government was the implementation of their property tax freeze. This is their way of holding off, until after the next election, on making any decisions or any real movement or change in the property tax problem that we have. I think it's actually unfair for the people of Ontario to have to wait until after the next election to get an understanding of the extent to which the government they have elected and are currently dealing with even acknowledges that there are massive changes that need to be made.

I spent some time over the summer reviewing what our critic, Michael Prue, was doing from our perspective as New Democrats in going to communities—in fact, he came to my community; he went to many communities across the province to simply talk to people about what their experience of the property tax system was and what they could recommend for change in that system.

Interestingly enough, in Hamilton we had people who raised a number of different issues. In fact, we had

people come to our public meeting who used to work for MPAC, who used to work for the assessment corporation—or for the government before there was an assessment corporation per se—and they brought some extremely interesting issues to the table. As a result of not only that particular input but of the input of many people in my community and in several other communities, we do have a solution or a program of solutions that includes not only the assessment system as it sits but also opportunities for taking responsibility for the fact, or acknowledging the fact and thereafter taking responsibility, that there were mistakes made in previous years in terms of what was provided for at the municipal level versus the provincial level in terms of paying for services. It's commonly called the download, the service realignment that the Conservative government undertook.

I remember that my community got realigned; in fact, my community got realigned in a couple of big ways. One was the download scenario and the other, of course, was amalgamation. We were dealing with both of those difficult situations all at once. It was quite challenging for me as a municipal councillor at the time, being fairly new to the job, to try to figure out exactly what the impacts of all of these things were going to be. Of course, we now know that the impacts were severe and significant, and in fact the few tools that were given to municipalities over the years to try to adjust to all of these pressures have simply failed—and they've failed miserably. I'm talking here tonight in Toronto when I know that on Friday, just a couple of days ago, we had massive flooding in the east end of Hamilton, on the edge of Stoney Creek. That flooding, some would say, was the direct result of the lack of capacity of our waste water treatment plant, which has a lack of capacity because of the inability of the municipality to invest to the levels they need to.

I'm not raising that as a way of blaming anybody, but only to reflect on the fact that one of the results, if you will, one of the consequences of the download, was that municipalities had to begin to undertake a number of different initiatives and responsibilities and fund those, and, as a result, the pressure to reduce budgets in other areas was great. So there were perhaps reduced amounts of investment in infrastructure, for example, or at least flatlining of those kinds of investments, for the purposes of making sure that other services that were now the municipalities' responsibility, like social housing, child care, land ambulance, welfare, social assistance, ODSP—

Mr. Prue: Public housing.

Ms. Horwath: I've already said public housing. It's not only the funding that came, but it's the greater responsibility for the administration of these programs that was significant as well. It put a big pressure on those municipalities.

So if there's one thing that I find specifically odious about Bill 151, it is that piece in there that's basically—the member for Beaches–East York called it the head-in-the-sand clause or the head-in-the-sand move or the ostrich move. Basically, this government, by having that section in this bill, is saying, “No, people of Ontario.

Yes, we know there's a problem. Yes, we know it's a concern. Yes, we know there's an issue here, but we won't give you any understanding of where we're going to go with this. We won't take responsibility for fixing it, even though we knew going in four years ago when we were first elected that it was a problem. But we're not going to tell you anything. In fact, we're going to set a date, conveniently, about three or four months after the next election, and then the freeze on your property taxes will come off and then maybe, if you're lucky, we'll begin to even discuss a solution." That's unacceptable, and the people of Ontario deserve better.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. That concludes the time allocated for third reading of Bill 151. Therefore, pursuant to the order of the House dated November 14, 2006, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Sorbara has moved third reading of Bill 151, An Act to enact various 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

I wish to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 28(h), I have received a deferral notice from the acting government whip asking that this vote be deferred until tomorrow at the time of deferred votes.

It being close enough to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1748.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 6 December 2006

Mercredi 6 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 6 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 6 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): I'm disgusted by the McGuinty government's gross mismanagement revealed in the Auditor General's report. On behalf of John Tory and the PC caucus, I have a message for Mr. McGuinty: You are the link between the hard-working taxpayer of Ontario and these intolerable spending abuses tolerated by your government.

Premier McGuinty's Minister of Children and Youth Services stood in her place yesterday and defended the spending abuses. She said, "The interesting thing is that these issues really aren't new." She's right.

The McGuinty government abused taxpayers' money in 2006, 2005, 2004 and 2003. A true leader steps up to the plate and takes responsibility. This is not about passing the buck, this is not about taking a powder, not about running around the corner and hiding. This is not about letting somebody else take the fall. This is about leadership. We are talking about taxpayers' money that's being spent on trips to Beijing; \$59,000 SUVs and all-inclusive resorts in St. Martin, St. Lucia; \$2,000 gym memberships; deficits, cost overruns, and no analysis by the McGuinty government.

Premier McGuinty, stop insulting the taxpayers of Ontario. No more self-congratulatory spin, no more deflection. We want action. Please stop flushing taxpayers' money down the toilet.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): Last month, I was pleased to spend a morning volunteering at the long-term-care home at St. Joseph's Health Centre in Guelph. After helping to serve breakfast, I was able to discuss some of the challenges of long-term care with the personal support workers and the nurses. I have also recently visited with residents and families at LaPointe-Fisher long-term care and with staff at Eden House long-term care.

These three homes range in age from fairly old to brand new. Naturally, building standards have changed over the years, but what all three homes have in common

is caring staff who provide high-quality, long-term care for their residents.

The problem we have in Guelph is that there are not enough of these high-quality placements. I often hear from families who are frustrated that the nearest available bed is an hour or more away from Guelph. One woman described to me how she had to take the bus from Guelph to Toronto and then back from Toronto to Orangeville in order to visit her husband.

You can imagine how thrilled I was to announce that the McGuinty government has recognized that Guelph is an underserved area and that 288 new long-term-care beds will be built in Guelph. My constituents are grateful that our government has recognized that long-term-care beds should be located in the home communities of residents and their families.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): Yesterday's report by the Auditor General detailed a laundry list of concerns in the health care sector. Despite the McGuinty rhetoric, the auditor brings to light many skeletons in the closet of this Liberal government and provides more evidence of broken promises and inaction that are directly impacting the quality of life of all Ontarians. The auditor's concerns are wide-ranging, from health card abuses to questionable wait times data to unsafe radiation exposure by patients and staff.

Let's recap some of yesterday's lowlights:

—300,000 more OHIP cards in existence than the total population in Ontario;

—a backlog of 7,000 fraud investigations involving OHIP cards;

—725 physicians who are no longer licensed but continue to submit claims to OHIP;

—suspected OHIP billing for patients who did not receive treatment;

—patients and staff being exposed to unhealthy amounts of radiation, including children who were given CT scans when the machine was on the adult setting;

—unfair and unequal access to treatment as Workplace Safety and Insurance Board patients jumped to the front of the line.

On top of this appalling inaction and waste, the auditor calls into question the accuracy of the government's wait times data and advises that claims of reduced wait times be taken with a grain of salt.

As a former Minister of Health, I find the government's response to the auditor's report to be embar-

raising and call on the current minister to take a long, hard look in the mirror before shifting responsibility for these issues. Clearly, this is his watch.

MISS G. PROJECT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): I rise in the House today to acknowledge the incredible contribution to feminism and education made by a group of young women called the Miss G. project.

Applause.

Ms. DiNovo: There they are. Their mission is to see women and gender studies as a mandatory part of a high school education.

When I was a high school student I remember well that suffragettes, not suffragists, were mocked openly by our Canadian history teacher and by other students. We haven't come such a long way from that day or from the days of Miss G. herself, who, as an academic and activist in the 19th century, was described as "unable to make a good brain that could stand the wear and tear of life."

On this day, when we acknowledge the violence done to women and work for a response, the education system is an obvious place to start, and yet this government has yet to accede to this simple request of the Miss G. project: mandatory women and gender studies courses in high school.

In honour of the hundreds of young women in the Miss G. project, the victims of École Polytechnique and Miss G. herself and other like her, let us now mandate women and gender studies in high schools today, not tomorrow, not next month. The government can do it. Let's see them do it. It is the very least they could do.

1340

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I rise today to inform the House of the tremendous progress being made in stem cell research here in Ontario. The recent grand opening of the Sprott Centre for Stem Cell Research at the Ottawa Health Research Institute is Ontario's latest triumph in this exciting field. The centre has been endowed with a generous \$7-million donation from Eric and Vizma Sprott.

Stem cell research is a priority of Ontario. The government has invested \$16 million on 18 research projects related to stem cells through the Ontario research fund and other predecessor programs. This includes \$4.4 million contributed to the Sprott centre through the Ontario Innovation Trust. We are creating an exciting research climate in Ontario that helps us retain and attract the world's best scientists.

The vision for the Sprott centre originated with Dr. Ron Worton, as a result of his groundbreaking stem cell research in Toronto several years ago. Dr. Worton is CEO and scientific director of the Ottawa Health Research Institute and also serves as vice-chair of the Ontario Research Fund Advisory Board. Dr. Michael

Rudnicki, the inaugural director of the Sprott centre, is also director of Canada's Stem Cell Network. Dr. Rudnicki is joined in Ontario by Dr. Gordon Keller, another leading stem cell scientist, who will be heading up the University Health Network's new McEwen Centre for Regenerative Medicine, here in Toronto.

There are many other examples of pioneering stem cell work being done across the province. All of these developments, from early-stage research through trials and commercialization and eventually to cures, combine to produce a better quality of life for Ontario families.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): Yesterday was a sad day in this Legislature and a sad day for Ontario's most vulnerable children. It was a day when this Liberal government was exposed for its gross mismanagement and waste of taxpayers' money. Unfortunately, waste and overspending is not new to the McGuinty Liberals. What makes the latest revelation most disturbing is the fact that it is the province's children who have been targeted.

The McGuinty Liberals have proven to the hard-working people of Ontario that they cannot be trusted with their tax dollars. When it comes to the McGuinty Liberals, it is no longer, "Watch the pennies, and the dollars will take care of themselves"; it has sadly become, "Wash off responsibility by breaking promises and saying anything to get elected, and let the kids take care of themselves." Here is some of what the Ministry of Children and Youth Services is making taxpayers responsible for: \$50,000 in luxury cars, all-inclusive vacations, needless trips and junkets to places like China and Argentina, double-dipping for expenses, \$2,000-a-year gym memberships and expensive personal trainers. This is what was discovered when reviewing only four of the 53 children's aid societies. In each one of these cases, the McGuinty Liberal government spent lavishly on themselves rather than being responsible and committing to the care of our most vulnerable people in society, our children.

Even with these shocking revelations, the Liberals still don't get it. In the response to the auditor's findings, the ministry made no mention of gross mismanagement and wasteful spending. Instead, they attempted to pass off responsibility. Someone must be held responsible for these outrageous actions. That starts and ends with the irresponsible and regrettable lack of action of the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

LIBRARY SERVICES

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I rise today to discuss some very good news with you and all the members of the Legislature about the town of Mattawa. Last Friday, I was delighted to join the mayor of Mattawa, Dean Backer, Councillors Mary Lou Arrow-smith and Garry Thibert, representatives of the Near

North District School Board, the Conseil Scolaire Catholique Franco Nord, Contact North, Canadore College and members of the Mattawa community to celebrate the reopening of the John Dixon Public Library and l'École secondaire F.J. McElligott Secondary School library at F.J. McElligott.

Through some Trillium funding and the Ministry of Culture's funding for libraries, this merger has taken place. The students and all of the community of Mattawa are going to benefit from the refurbished facility within the school proper, which has more computer terminals, a better joint collection, a great children's section, and really lots of excitement about the new facility.

Friday night, the town of Mattawa celebrated Christmas through their very snowy Christmas parade of lights.

This past Monday, the board of the Mattawa General Hospital gathered with the mayor, representatives from the town council, the staff at the hospital and members of the Mattawa community to salute and acknowledge the hard work of 54 past board members and seven past CEOs at their annual Christmas dinner. The group gathered at the Golden Age Club to celebrate all the hard work of the past. The evening culminated with a visit from the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, George Smitherman, and the announcement of final approval for their long-awaited new construction project. The community is overjoyed, and is thrilled that they will gather on December 16 to break ground and enjoy—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

HEALTH PROMOTION

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I rise today to celebrate a wonderful model of collaboration in Hamilton, a collaboration to build a healthy community in all aspects of the meaning. This collaboration demonstrates the vision of the Ministry of Health Promotion.

Recently, I was on hand while our government made an announcement of \$2 million in funding for construction of a new facility for the YMCA. This community centre will also be partnered with the city of Hamilton, Hamilton Health Sciences Corp., Hamilton Police Service and the Hamilton Public Library.

The YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington will focus on health and wellness and will promote a wide variety of programs, such as recreational activities, for all ages.

The YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington is celebrating 150 years in our community with exemplary leadership, building great relationships with individuals, families and the community, that has affected an amazing number of lives.

I want to applaud Jim Commerford, president and CEO, Bryan Webber, vice-president of finance, and the board of directors of the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington for the wonderful work they have done to create a vision to open this new multi-centre complex in the city of Hamilton.

It was also an honour to have Les Chater and his family in attendance. Mr. Chater has been a member of

the YMCA since he was 10 years old. He is now 95 years old. Mr. Chater has served on the board of directors and continues to be a dynamic spokesman for the YMCA. Mr. Chater was honoured that this new facility will bear his name.

This project will be a model of healthy living for years to come, and I want to thank Minister Watson and the Ministry of Health Promotion for believing in Hamilton.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Christmas came early to the Festival City. On November 30, I was honoured to represent the Honourable Sandra Pupatello at the sod turning for Aisin Canada Inc.'s new manufacturing plant in my hometown of Stratford. Aisin is creating more good jobs in Ontario, the kinds of jobs that bring prosperity to our communities, raise our standard of living and provide greater opportunities for our families.

By establishing a new production plant in Stratford, Aisin Canada is building a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility that will support Toyota's new assembly plant currently under construction in nearby Woodstock. The Aisin Canada plant is a prime example of the wider benefits we anticipated when the McGuinty government began our aggressive auto investment plan just three years ago. Our government knew that by attracting more auto assembly production, the key parts suppliers would follow.

I want to congratulate Stratford Mayor Dan Mathieson, economic development officer Larry Appel and the entire Stratford team on a job very well done.

The Aisin Canada Inc. investment is the result of the Premier's commitment to investing in the education and skills that people need in order to create the best workforce in North America.

I believe that our government is on the right track. Aisin Canada, by creating high-value jobs in the city of Stratford, is helping fulfill the Premier's goal of building North America's most productive auto industry right here in Ontario. For the third year running, Ontario is the leading automotive manufacturing jurisdiction in all of North America. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and merry Christmas.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on social policy and move its adoption.

The Acting Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended;

Bill 152, An Act to modernize various Acts administered by or affecting the Ministry of Government Services / *Projet de loi 152, Loi visant à moderniser diverses lois qui relèvent du ministère des Services gouvernementaux ou qui le touchent.*

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ADULT EDUCATION ÉDUCATION DES ADULTES

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I rise in the House today to report on the McGuinty government's progress in adult education. As I remind everyone here, adult students are the parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles of the children in our schools.

In June 2005, my report Ontario Learns was released. It documented the lack of cohesion in what I described then as the adult education non-system. I used the image of an archipelago without a good ferry system and recommended how to begin improving this important area of the education continuum.

1350

L'éducation des adultes est essentielle à la prospérité économique et au bien-être social des personnes et des collectivités en Ontario. That's why we are strengthening the programs and services in adult education.

Today I announced that the McGuinty government is investing an additional \$2 million in this important sector in adult education. This investment will give all adult learners greater access to improved skill assessments and course selection. This is in addition to the recent \$10-million investment made by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for academic upgrading programs that will help 4,200 learners develop their skills and attain better employment.

What I recommended in my report was better coordination of the system. This means more consistency within the government with the ministries responsible for adult education—because adult education is located in at least three ministries. For example, we now deliver more English-as-a-second-language and French-as-a-second-language classes through an investment of over \$50 million each year by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

The development and delivery of programs and services for adult learners will also be more cohesive with our new adult education policy unit created within the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. The unit will make it easier for individuals to navigate the adult education system so they can upgrade their knowledge and skills. We want adult learners to spend their time studying and learning, not

trying to understand where to find the courses in a system that's disconnected and confusing.

Through our \$2-million investment announced today, we're undertaking three important initiatives that make the system easier to use. First, information will be collected from all school boards on what adult education programs they offer. Then we'll publish that information on a public website. Right now, that information is not available in any systematic way. Second, tools will be developed for all adult education providers that will more consistently assess the essential skills of adult learners. Finally, we will make it easier for adult learners to have high school credits earned in other provinces recognized toward the Ontario secondary school diploma.

Our top priority is making sure that all adults have better access to existing programs and services. I know—we all know—that there's definitely more to be done, but these recent initiatives are exactly the types of planned policies we need. I had the opportunity to speak at CESBA, the Continuing Education School Board Administrators, this morning. They seemed to be very pleased that we were moving in this direction. They're taking part with us in these things.

Nous faisons des investissements judicieux, en commençant par jeter des bases solides, afin d'accroître les possibilités pour les apprenantes et apprenants adultes. Notre gouvernement s'est engagé envers l'éducation, depuis la petite enfance jusqu'à l'âge mûr.

We are reducing class sizes for our youngest students, emphasizing reading, writing and math with our youth, helping more teens graduate, and we are helping more adult learners succeed.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): In response to the statement by the Minister of Education, this is yet one more attempt by this government to deflect attention from the house of cards that successive Liberal Ministers of Education have been building.

Hiding behind dribbles of funding that are announced at great fanfare, this government continues to ignore the single most important issue facing education in Ontario today, and that is the updating of the basic education funding formula, a promise that Dalton McGuinty made and that he and three successive ministers have failed to address.

The Minister of Education is now the third minister in a row to ignore the appeals from every stakeholder in education to keep the Dalton McGuinty promise to update that funding formula. So I ask the minister: When you know that school boards across this province are in a funding crisis, why do you continue to ignore them?

Earlier today you announced \$2 million for adult education across Ontario. Clearly, those you charmed into ovation haven't taken the time to seriously consider what it is that you've announced. The amount of \$2 million over 72 boards translates into some \$27,000 per board. And what does it really mean? One more website for the government to advance your propaganda without addressing education and the fundamental work that you should be doing as a minister.

Your stakeholders, Minister, are abandoning you very rapidly. On October 20, 2006, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation held a press conference, and they held that press conference because they're concerned about the funding crisis facing school boards across this province. They challenged this minister and pointed out that school boards across this province are dipping into reserves and cutting programs and services from front-line education programs to meet this minister's program announcements that she and previous Ministers of Education failed to address with serious funding.

I want to quote Desiree Francis, the executive officer for the province of the OSSTF:

"We are now into the fourth year of the McGuinty government's mandate and this government has still not addressed fundamental problems with the education funding formula. Three successive Ministers of Education have acknowledged the problems, but none has made the changes necessary to ensure school boards have adequate stable funding to meet the needs of their students and communities."

Ms. Francis continues, "A substantial portion of all new education funding has been earmarked for specific ministry initiatives and has not helped boards cover the funding shortfall for core operating expenses. And even when the government did add \$600 million to the education budget last spring to bridge the funding gap for teacher salaries,"—which this government unilaterally negotiated—"it did so at the expense of the local priorities and learning opportunities grants. A total of \$511 million was removed from these grants and with the loss of this money, boards also lost what little flexibility they had to address local needs."

I continue with this quote. "Recently, Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne suggested that her government has taken a step-by-step approach to funding," and to changes in the funding formula. "We say, look again." Minister, this is the OSSTF speaking to you. "As Hugh Mackenzie's recent analysis of education funding shows, in the 905 area alone the government's funding shell game has meant that two of the largest urban public boards, Peel and Toronto, actually have less funding per student in 2006-07 than in 1997. The chair of the Durham board says his board must tap into their reserves for the \$5 million they need to meet the costs of special education. In Niagara, transportation funding is still based on pre-1998 data."

Minister, you are failing education in the province of Ontario. Your propaganda announcements are wearing thin with education stakeholders in this province. Why don't you get down to the work that you as Minister of Education should be doing? Look at the fundamental funding formula, bring the money to the table and ensure that boards can do the work that they are responsible to do.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): With all due respect, Minister, the Tories used to dole out 1-800 numbers, and you Liberals dish out websites. It's "Have websites, will travel." I've got to say to the adult learners,

one wrong character and who knows where it might take you, just as a little reminder.

Once again the McGuinty government is faced with a serious crisis, and once again they respond not with a solution but with a website. Adult education in this province is in turmoil, and the cuts keep coming. The government responds by creating a website so people will know where to find adult education classes. Unfortunately, anyone naive enough to use it will find that there are fewer and fewer adult education classes to find.

The minister makes reference to the great work that the minister of post-secondary education is doing, and I want to say that we have already seen the government's sliding standards with regard to apprenticeship funding. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities issues an apprenticeship training tax credit, nominally for employers who train employees. Last year, we learned that Dell computers will receive the credit for staff in their Ottawa call centres. To quote the Ottawa citizen, "The province has generously included IT call centre workers in the apprenticeship plan, subsidizing their wages by allowing Dell to collect a tax credit of \$5,000 per employee for three years. The actual training period for the call centre workers is two to three weeks, Dell says."

That's the extent of the great training being provided by the minister of post-secondary education, and if he wants to elucidate for those of us whom he believes are wrong, he might just want to let us know how it is that the Ottawa Citizen is wrong in that regard.

Despite repeated promises, the McGuinty government has not fixed the education funding formula. They promised investments in adult education, but there's still no grant for adult general interest and seniors' programming across Ontario. This means these programs are being cancelled because boards don't have the funds to keep them going.

The Canadian Adult and Community Education Alliance notes that fees for general interest adult courses have risen 115% in the past five years, forcing many seniors to opt out.

Here is a short list of school boards that have made cuts to adult education in this past budget year: the French public board for southwestern Ontario; the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board; the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board; the Toronto District School Board. And when trustees of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board refused to cut adult education, the McGuinty Liberals kicked them out, took them out of their jobs, and are now making these cuts themselves. Continuing education cuts in adult education in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board: We're talking about \$927,000. These are the kinds of cuts that they are experiencing in Dufferin-Peel, and all we get for that is a website.

People for Education report a 17% drop in the number of continuing education programs over the last decade.

Jack Henshaw of Citizens for Lifelong Learning said that the Ontario Liberals rallied with seniors in 2003 to protect adult education from cuts by the previous Conser-

vative government. Three years later, these programs remain unfunded by the province, and seniors are again fighting to protect them, this time from the Liberals.

This government has no reason to have any pride whatsoever in its record on these matters.

I would prefer that the minister would come out and say, "We don't have the money. In fact, we're not going to raise the money, now or in the future. What it means is that we're going to be cutting programs across Ontario." I would rather you say that than simply say, "We're going to have a website so adult learners can hopefully find something, assuming the program still exists, so they can fit into some program somewhere in the province." That's not providing services.

Programs have been cut. They need programs, not a website to find out where programs still exist that they might be able to get into, assuming that the fee is not so high that they won't be able to afford it. You're not offering anything valuable or good to adult learners.

VISITORS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Now that there are more members in the House, I just want to introduce some wonderful young people who are here from the Miss G. project, who would love to see women's and gender studies in our high schools.

DEFERRED VOTES

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2006 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2006 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES (N^O 2)

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 151, An Act to enact various 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 151, Loi édictant diverses mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2006 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1404 to 1414.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Sorbara has moved third reading of Bill 151, An Act to enact various 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 151, Loi édictant diverses mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2006 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher

Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael

Peters, Steve
Peterson, Tim
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra

Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bountrogianni, Marie
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brownell, Jim
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Chambers, Mary Anne V.
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duncan, Dwight

Hoy, Pat
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Marsales, Judy
Matthews, Deborah
McGuinity, Dalton
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Mitchell, Carol
Mossop, Jennifer F.
Parsons, Ernie
Patten, Richard

Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed, will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Amott, Ted
Barrett, Toby
Bisson, Gilles
Chudleigh, Ted
DiNovo, Cheri
Horwath, Andrea
Hudak, Tim
Klees, Frank
Kormos, Peter

MacLeod, Lisa
Marchese, Rosario
Martel, Shelley
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
Murdoch, Bill
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.

Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.
Scott, Laurie
Sterling, Norman W.
Tabuns, Peter
Tory, John
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakubuski, John

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 54; the nays are 27.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill be now passed and be entitled as in the motion.

DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes remembering the Montreal massacre.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has asked for unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes on remembering the Montreal massacre. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Barbara Klucznik Widajewicz, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte.

Today, we mark the national Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. We mourn the tragic and senseless loss of 14 talented young women who were killed simply because they were women.

We hold candlelight vigils and take part in awareness campaigns, offering hope to women and girls for whom abuse is a reality.

It's a day to reflect and remember all those who have died as a result of gender-based violence.

It's been 17 years since this incident and violence is still a very much a part of women's lives across the province. One in every four Ontario women, at some point, experiences abuse by her partner in her lifetime. Thirty-seven per cent of these occurrences are witnessed by children, who are more than likely to grow up to become abusers or victims in their own relationships.

Our government's working to improve these odds, to improve them through our domestic violence action plan. We're investing more than \$82 million over four years, exceeding our original target of \$66 million.

Over the past two years, we've worked with women's organizations, experts and those dedicated across the province, and I want to recognize their tireless efforts. Together, we've made progress.

More women and children fleeing from domestic violence will benefit from a \$2.5-million investment to help women's agencies strengthen counselling services.

1420

In the new year, social housing providers will have the opportunity to participate in training sessions to increase their awareness of and sensitivity to the issues and challenges faced by abused women as they make their transition to new and safer lives. Our recently launched neighbours, friends and families initiative will help people recognize the signs and risk factors associated with violence against women and how to respond. That means it's all of our responsibility. More than 25 communities have confirmed their commitment to launch this campaign locally. Our goal is to have all communities across the province participate.

I encourage members of this Legislature to get involved as an individual, as a leader in your own community. Materials, including English and French public service announcements, are available from the neighbours, friends and families website, neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca. Only when we all work together against violence can we end it.

Our government has recently invested \$8.2 million to help women get skills they need to become financially independent. It includes employment training programs in the skilled trades and information technology. We're addressing the very root causes of violence against women by helping young people develop positive attitudes through our equalityrules.ca campaign that we launched this month. This campaign and website teaches girls and boys about healthy, equal relationships. It makes it clear that abuse in any form is not okay.

Since 1991, the YWCA has also distributed rose buttons on December 6 to mark the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. I encourage all members of this House to grab their button. I have rose buttons with me today and invite you to pick them up and demonstrate your commitment to ending violence against women.

Over the past few weeks, international campaigns and commemorations have shone the world spotlight on the sad reality of violence against women. We must be constant in our actions and diligent in our efforts year-

round. Today we were at Women's College with a number of people in that audience who take action every day to help end violence against women. I am pleased to say my government is taking action. And we won't rest until women can live free from violence. I believe all of us in this House believe it and are prepared to take action.

Mr. Speaker, when all of our members have spoken today, I'm hoping you'll ask for a moment of silence on behalf of these 14 women and also to celebrate the action that we're prepared to take and are taking to end violence against women.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I'm very pleased to rise today on behalf of our leader, John Tory, and the members of the PC caucus to recognize this day, December 6, as the national Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women in Canada. Established in 1991 by the Parliament of Canada, this day coincides with the anniversary of the Montreal massacre, when a gunman murdered 14 young women at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal. These women were killed simply because of their gender.

This day of remembrance is important for all of us. It is a day to reflect on the tragic loss of the lives of these young women, young women with so much promise and on the cusp of life. However, it is also a day to reflect on the broader issue of violence against women, which we know impacts all females of all ages.

Today, I had the privilege of attending once again a commemorative service at Women's College Hospital that reminded all of us that today is a time to reflect on violence against women, not only here but around the entire world. It is a time to think about all the women and girls who live daily with the threat of violence. Certainly, as a mother myself, I know that I have warned my daughter always to be careful. It's something that you just do. It is a time to remember those whose lives have been affected by violence—and they are many. Finally, more important than anything else today, it is a time to take action—further action to do what we can to stop the violence.

In this regard, today the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario did take action. They took action in response to the need to stop violence in the workplace, including the death of Lori Dupont, the Windsor registered nurse who was murdered at her workplace. Today they released their policy statement, "Violence Against Nurses in the Workplace: A Zero Tolerance Approach."

This encourages all health care organizations to develop and adopt a set of policies that guide employees and their supervisors through a set of steps if they experience violence on the job. This, we know, is an issue that is not going to go away. We need to recognize that there is violence in the workplace and we need to take action to stop it, as this document suggests we do.

It is encouraging to see organizations such as the RNAO taking action to ensure that steps are taken to decrease the violence against women; however, there continues to be more work to be done. We know, when we look at the statistics, that women and girls continue to

make up the vast majority of victims of sexual assault. I was rather dismayed to hear from Chief Blair today that in Toronto the rate of domestic murders is up to seven this year.

Women continue to feel worried and concerned when they walk alone, when they walk in the dark or when they wait for public transit, as we saw recently at York University when it was reported last week that yet another female student had been sexually assaulted at gunpoint. Clearly, this is unacceptable. Obviously, this violence prevents women from making a full and positive contribution to their lives.

So we must work together to eradicate gender-based forms of violence. We need to educate the public about what they can do to help change attitudes and behaviours that contribute to the continuation of violent and abusive behaviour against women.

In that regard, I want to recognize the members of the Miss G. Project who are here today in our gallery. They have come today, December 6, because they want to draw a connection between the remembrance of these 14 women and the continued gender violence within our educational institutions and some of the causes. They have an idea that they feel would help prevent such violence. They want to establish a women's and gender studies course. They have been advocating for this to be included in the high school curriculum. We congratulate you for the actions you are taking to help stop violence against women.

Today in this House we not only remember the 14 women who were killed in Montreal, but we remember all of the women in Canada and throughout the world, including the Mennonite girls recently in Pennsylvania, killed because they were female.

I encourage my colleagues to take this to heart. I've stood in this House for what seems many years. I just ask you to seriously consider what you can do, and to consider your own behaviour and reaffirm—all of us—our commitment to take whatever steps we can personally and collectively to prevent violence against women and girls. It is only through our individual and collective actions that we are going to be able to decrease and hopefully eradicate violence against women.

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would ask for unanimous consent in order that we can wear our buttons.

The Speaker: Mrs. Witmer has asked for unanimous consent so that we may wear the buttons. Agreed? Agreed.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Seventeen years ago, 14 female students at l'École Polytechnique were murdered simply because they were women. This horrible event galvanized Canada's attention to a problem that has plagued women throughout the course of history.

The murdered women were promising young engineering students in their prime: Geneviève Bergeron, aged 21; Hélène Colgan, 23; Nathalie Croteau, 23; Barbara Daigneault, 22; Anne-Marie Edward, 21; Maud Haviernick, 29; Barbara Maria Klucznik, 31; Maryse Leclair, 23; Annie St-Arneault, 23; Michèle Richard, 21;

Maryse Laganière, 25; Anne-Marie Lemay, 22; Sonia Pelletier, 28; and Annie Turcotte, 21.

For their loved ones, the pain of the Montreal massacre will never be erased. Today, we remember those families and mourn their loss.

1430

The Montreal massacre led to promises of changes that step by step would eventually eradicate violence against women. Yet here in 2006, can we honestly say that we are in fact further ahead? Hundreds of Ontario women have died since 1989 at the hands of men who were strangers, but far more often by men with whom they once had close, personal relationships. Families lost their daughters, mothers, sisters, aunts, nieces, neighbours. Why? Because we as a society have not done a good enough job of changing the culture of male violence and misogyny that continues to plague women. Women still pay with their lives.

How shameful, how appalling it is to note that at a time when women's voices are needed more than ever, the Harper government cuts Status of Women Canada massively, a move that I myself have opposed by putting a resolution to the Legislature here at Queen's Park. As legislators, it is our duty to protect, in fact to amplify, these voices and prevent the perpetuation of violence against women at all costs.

Many times I have risen in this House to talk about the importance of getting at the root causes of violence against women. It's not that women's groups, service providers, coroners' juries and study after study haven't already instructed governments on what needs to be done. Ontario's coalition of women's groups has indicated a \$300-million package of emergency measures that would go a long way to free women trapped in and confronted by violence. A large part of the solution lies in the provision of affordable housing and child care, resettlement funds, meaningful employment and income supports that enable a woman to support her children, enabling women to leave a violent home—not just websites and pilot projects.

A key to erasing the violence is the will and determination to act, on all our parts, as both previous speakers have indicated. We must say no to delays in flowing the funding for programs and services women need to enable them to flee violence. We must strongly reject the Harper government's cuts to Status of Women Canada. We must say no to initiatives that languish on the back burner instead of being implemented. We must say no to attempts to downplay the severity and urgency of this life-and-death issue, which the World Health Organization describes as a global epidemic; and no to shelving reports and stalling legislation that call for stronger actions.

In fact, there is a private member's bill that I have on the books, Bill 45, which tackles workplace harassment and violence, and which has already been spoken about in today's remarks.

Alberta shows how seriously it deals with this problem as a province through a long list of items that it pays for to ensure that women can escape the violence and begin

to rebuild their lives. I've mentioned these measures in the House before. They include a number of different initiatives, including that women in abusive situations can get help 24 hours a day, seven days a week, through Alberta Works. All they need to do is call a toll-free number and, if eligible, the fund will cover them. It will cover them to get to safety, to set up a new household, and it actually covers their expenses to begin their new life.

Thankfully, there are many great people in our province working in the field who support this fight, groups like OAITH, METRAC, OFL and member organizations, the White Ribbon Campaign, the YWCA, sexual assault centres—the one in my own community does a lot of great work—and many others.

Today, we have members of the Miss G. Project here in the gallery who have already been recognized a couple of times. These young women see education as an important plank in ending the violence, and I agree. They're hopeful that they'll see women's studies included in the core curriculum of all secondary schools.

I can tell you that nothing would make me more proud than to see Ontario emerge as a leader, expanding its programs and services to the fullest extent to protect the lives of women and girls, and to see the kinds of programs that these young women are asking for actually implemented in our schools. I urge the women of the McGuinty government—the cabinet ministers and other women in that caucus—as well as their supporters to make sure that these kinds of initiatives actually do come to light in the province of Ontario.

In memory of the 14 women slain on December 6 and all the women who have been murdered before and since, let us all pledge to do more and do better in their names.

The Speaker: I ask all members and all our guests to stand for a period of silence.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker: Thank you.

VISITOR

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In the west gallery we have Mr. Sandy Singers, executive director of the food bank in Kingston and president of the Ontario Association of Food Banks. I would like to welcome him to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. The Auditor General's report yesterday contained outrageous reports of improper

spending in a whole lot of places, including Hydro One and OPG.

In 2005, \$163 million worth of goods and services were purchased by employees of Hydro One with company credit cards, apparently without paperwork to back them up, according to the Attorney General. To put that in perspective, in order to spend \$163 million over the course of one year, people would have to be spending half a million dollars every day for 365 days on the company credit card.

We heard some words from you today professing concern about the taxpayers' money, but we don't see any obvious consequences when these kinds of scandals are unearthed.

My question is: Who is actually going to do something about the disrespect for the taxpayers' money, and when will there actually be some consequences from this kind of thing being unearthed in Auditor General reports like the one we saw yesterday? When are you going to do something?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm looking forward to the time, but maybe I should not hold my breath, when the leader of the official opposition celebrates the fact that for the first time in the history of this province we have a government that invited the Auditor General to take a look into those areas which they refused to allow him into.

For years and years, the Auditor General said, "I want to get into children's aid societies, I want to get into hospitals, I want to get into school boards, I want to get into community colleges, I want to get into universities," and they said, "Tough, you're not getting in there. We don't want to know what's inside there." He said, "I want to get into long-term-care homes, I want to get into Hydro One, I want to get into OPG," and they said, "You're not getting in there under any circumstances."

What we have done is changed the law in Ontario and invited the Auditor General to take a look at exactly what is happening inside those places. We are pleased to have this information made available to us for the first time, and we look forward to acting on it.

Mr. Tory: I will stand in my place and say that I'm glad it's done. At the same time, I'm sure the Premier will agree with me that just doing that and just having the information is of little value to the taxpayers if you don't act on it. After the revelations we've seen in the last day or so, which result from weeks and months of information that has been made available to the ministers and to these corporations, we still don't have anybody taking responsibility for this. Whether it's the minister, whether it's the CEO, whether it's the Premier, nobody is taking responsibility. The message sent by that is that no one is responsible and there are no consequences for this abuse of taxpayers' money. That is what I'm asking about today.

We have one executive, who the media reports suggest is Mr. Parkinson, the CEO of Hydro One, who has \$50,000 in expenditures that were put through on a credit

card by his secretary, and that seems to allow it to escape normal public scrutiny. What I'm asking you is: What specific steps have you taken and will you take to get to the bottom of this and make sure there are consequences?
1440

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: One of the important opportunities that this new information that has been brought to the light of day creates is this: It's an opportunity for our government—and I'm sure the leader of the official opposition would want to share in this—to say to the people of Ontario, whether they're employed in the immediate public sector or the broader sector, "There's a new day in Ontario. There's more scrutiny, more transparency, more accountability and more responsibility. Everybody should get a sense of responsibility, and understanding that, we have to be very careful when it comes to how we deal with taxpayer money."

That's the important message that arises from this new opportunity we've created for the Auditor General. That's the message we're sending to Ontarians, wherever they happen to work, whether in the immediate or the broader public sector or in our government agencies. We are saying, "It's a new day. We've given the Auditor General the authority to find out exactly what you're doing. Start behaving responsibly. Start acting in the way that you know the people of Ontario expect you to act."

Mr. Tory: There's just one part missing from that very nice speech by the Premier, which is, "If you don't do it, there are going to be some consequences, and for those we know have done it, there are going to be consequences. You don't get away with it."

Now, this isn't the first time Mr. Parkinson's name has come up in this place. On April 4, eight months ago, we asked you and the then minister about a bonus that he got of \$500,000. On that day, all we were asking you to do was to provide us and the people of Ontario with the terms pursuant to which he got that bonus. You told us when we asked a few weeks later to let the people take the time to find out. We're here eight months later: no answer, no report, no accountability. When people see that the Premier of Ontario won't come forward with any explanation at all for a \$500,000 bonus, what are they to think, when they work in those corporations and in the government, about \$50,000, \$5,000 or \$500? That's what happens when you say one thing, you do another and you don't follow through.

What explanation do you have for Mr. Parkinson's bonus, his expenses and what are you going to do about it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Let's hear what the Auditor General had to say in terms of who follows up on what recommendations. This is what he said about the Conservatives. In this report of 2003, he said: "It was apparent to us this year that there were far too many areas where prior year concerns—often going back four, five, six or even 10 years—had not been satisfactorily addressed.... There is no excuse for a lack of effective action after so many years have passed."

This is what he's saying now about our government. He said, "I have seen an improvement over the past three

years.... Of particular interest is the number of audits where the progress made to date is not only satisfactory but significant—action is being taken on all recommendations, with a number already having been substantially implemented."

When we get advice and recommendations from the Provincial Auditor, we act on them. Not only that, we increased the ambit of his authority so that he can look at more places, which the opposite side refused to allow him to enter into.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. I notice there's no answer on the specific question of today, so that's some follow-up.

I want to read two statements that have been made about the wait times website. The first is from your Minister of Health on October 24, 2005, when he described the website as "up-to-date," "reliable and accurate." On December 5, 2006, the Auditor General of Ontario, an independent officer of this Legislature, said the website was "misleading and ought to be taken with a grain of salt."

For people waiting and often suffering while they wait for tests and treatment, the issue has once again become the credibility of the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty. My question for the Premier is this: When it comes to wait times in Ontario, who should Ontarians believe? The Premier and the Minister of Health, who obviously have a huge interest in making things look good, or the Auditor General, an independent officer of this Legislature who says your wait time figures are misleading? Who should we believe?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The people of Ontario should have confidence in the information that is gathered and presented to them. Indeed, the circumstances are very clear. Respectfully, we beg to differ with the approach that is on offer from the Auditor General. He suggests in his report that it's not appropriate to characterize all patients together for the same services. We beg to differ. We think it's crucial that we measure circumstances related to all patients and not create distinctions.

But on this point, we take everything the Auditor General says seriously. We're working with those experts we rely upon for advice to take a look at the suggestions that are on offer from the Auditor General. This is not work that has been taken lightly. It has involved people who are esteemed in their field, and they provided a lot of leadership around this, under the direction of Dr. Anne Keller from St. Michael's Hospital.

We recognize that there is a distinction in his approach from that which we've taken. We stand by ours; we think it's right. We agree that there are always opportunities to

look for improvement, and indeed we'll take the comments the Auditor General offers in that spirit and we'll be very—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tory: The minister's answer betrays what part of the problem is here. The fact is that the Auditor General has caught the government red-handed giving Ontarians wait time information he described as misleading. He, too, gathered information and presented it to the public—not just you—and he's an independent officer of this Legislature who has no interest in advancing his own case. He says the wait time measurements vary from hospital to hospital, and he says the very thing you take such pride in talking about, that a patient is a patient is a misleading way to calculate these wait times. Surely you can't compare someone who is in the hospital to get a test with someone waiting outside the hospital for a test and just average them all together.

The site was updated not long ago. It says that people in Peterborough are waiting 32 days for an MRI, but we know from the auditor's report that it could well be the case that they're waiting twice as long—64 days—for that test. The 90th percentile, in fact, is 53 days.

So can you tell us what is the actual wait time for an MRI in Peterborough, not based on your data that the Auditor General—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I say to the honourable member that he wants to pretend again that all patients are not together; that there are distinctions among patients. We think it's absolutely crucial that we present information to people that is understandable; not with 1,000 columns, but with the columns that reflect the very real circumstances.

If you are a patient in the Peterborough community seeking access to that hospital for the purposes of an MRI, we have collected data in a fashion that speaks very honestly to the circumstances for that patient group.

Again, we say that the honourable member likes to present a circumstance here and likes to characterize it in such a fashion that all those experts—led by Dr. Anne Keller and involving Dr. Alan Hudson, one of the foremost medical practitioners known to our country—have hosed the public. This is the suggestion the honourable member is offering.

I stand here as one who has accepted the judgment of experts in this area. We'll look very carefully at the advice the Auditor General offers, but we stand by our information. No matter how you measure it, 90th percentile—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: I can't believe that the minister actually believes and wants the House and, more importantly, the public to believe there is no difference between someone in the hospital waiting for a test and someone outside the hospital.

The Auditor General himself said the average for someone waiting for a test in the hospital is one day. You

will not find anybody outside the hospital who is waiting one day for a test, and when you average that in, you are, according to the Auditor General, misleading the public as to what the real time is that they have to wait for the test. So these are, by his admission, bogus numbers.

All we're asking you to do is tell the public the truth. If you want to break it out on the basis that all the patients should be shown, then show, as he suggests, how long the people in the hospital and the people outside the hospital are waiting, so that the majority, who are outside the hospital, will have a real number to look at. Why wouldn't you do that in the interest of fairly and accurately informing the public so that your website and the \$2-million propaganda ad campaign won't, as the Auditor General said, mislead the public? Why not?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The evidence is very clear that a 78% increase in access to MRIs in our province has resulted in lower wait times for the people of Ontario.

If the honourable member now wishes to change his stance—he stood in this place in the spring session and said, "You must offer these measurements on the basis of the 90th percentile," and we altered it to present it in the way that the honourable opposition leader himself suggested on that day.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I need to be able to hear the Minister of Health. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: They don't like to hear it. But now he suggests, in a fashion that works well for him today, that we should alter that course.

The circumstances are clear. If we distinguish in the fashion that the honourable Auditor General has recommended—and we'll take a very close look at that—the conclusion will be drawn for the people of Ontario in a very clear fashion: Wait times are down for MRIs in Ontario.

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ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. The McGuinty government admits there is a problem with the corporate culture at Hydro One, a culture of entitlement. Indeed, there is a problem when the chief executive officer runs \$45,000 of his expenses through an assistant's credit card in order to escape accountability. Indeed, there is a problem when expense control measures are circumvented by the very person who's supposed to enforce them, the chief executive officer.

Premier, the chief executive officer sets the corporate culture. If you want to change the corporate culture at Hydro One, then I suggest you change the chief executive officer. When is the McGuinty government going to fire Mr. Parkinson, the chief executive officer?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): I am delighted that our government allowed the Auditor

General to go into Hydro One and OPG to look at their response. I'm also glad—they laugh across the way—that we applied freedom of information to Hydro One and OPG. I'm also glad that we provided for full salary disclosure at OPG and Hydro One. We're letting the sun shine in.

This government has a responsibility that it takes very seriously to protect the integrity of those two utilities. We will act according to the recommendations of the auditor in a way that we believe protects not only the interests of the corporation itself but, more importantly, the interests of all consumers in Ontario. That's our responsibility. We take it seriously. We will act appropriately and in a timely fashion.

Mr. Hampton: I think this rests with the Premier. The Premier says that he wants to promote open, transparent and accountable government. This is not the first time that the chief executive officer at Hydro One has abused his privileges. Only a short while ago he was caught taking joyrides on the Hydro One corporate helicopter. This is someone whose pay is way out of line with every other public utility in Canada. The McGuinty government says you scold him, but it would appear to me he is laughing in the face of the McGuinty government.

Premier, the average person on the street wouldn't put up with this conduct, this nonsense, for one minute. Why does the McGuinty government pander to Mr. Parkinson and his incredible greed? When is the McGuinty government going to do something? When are you going to fire Mr. Parkinson, the CEO At Hydro One?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government takes very seriously its responsibility with respect to Hydro One, as we did with OPG three years ago now when we had to make a number of changes there with respect to getting that company back to profitability, where I'm pleased to say it is today.

Our first responsibility is the integrity of the organization, and that integrity is vital to the interests of consumers in Ontario. This government and this Premier put their interests first and will act accordingly, and that is why we were pleased to receive, though disappointed in, the findings of the Auditor General. We'll deal with them in an appropriate fashion, in a timely way, to ensure that the integrity of the corporation and, more importantly, the confidence of Ontario consumers are maintained.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, this is someone who has sought to avoid scrutiny. This is someone who sought to avoid his expenses being covered by an audit process and by the board of directors at Hydro One. That is certainly a firing offence. This is someone who collects a huge pay packet, out of all proportion to everybody else who runs a public hydro utility in Canada. Yet the McGuinty government says with the uncovering of this information that you are not really going to do anything. This is somebody who's laughing in the face of hydro consumers across the province who can't pay their bill.

I'm going to ask the Premier again: We've heard you give the speech, Premier, but the talk is cheap. It's time to clean up the corporate greed over at Hydro One, and

you must start by getting rid of the person who leads the organization. When is the McGuinty government going to fire the chief executive officer, Mr. Parkinson, at Hydro One?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government has taken a number of steps to ensure the integrity of that corporation. In fact, the corporation has had three credit rating improvements in the last year. That being said, these recommendations from the auditor are very serious recommendations that we do not take lightly. We are going to deal with them. We began dealing with them yesterday afternoon upon receipt. We will deal with them in a responsible fashion. We will deal with them in a way that protects the interests of Ontario hydro consumers in every region of the province.

These issues are important. I am glad that we have the provincial auditor looking at companies like Hydro One and OPG. I am glad that we brought in freedom of information. I am glad that we brought in salary disclosure. We take our responsibility to act on these recommendations very seriously and we will do so in a way that protects the interests of all consumers in Ontario.

CT SCANS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier—and it sounds like we're going to get more McGuinty speeches and no action—yesterday, the Auditor General revealed children are being exposed to massive doses of radiation when they go for CT scans. One CT scan for a child can equal up to 4,000 X-rays, eight times what adults face in CT scans, and children exposed to radiation are at greater risk of developing radiation-related cancers later in life. Despite the startling facts, proper CT scan settings for children were not used at least 50% of the time in Ontario hospitals.

The minister said yesterday that he's known about this for at least three months. My question is, why didn't your minister warn parents and children when he first found out about this three months ago?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The honourable member has attributed a statement to me that is inaccurate. I think the procedure works this way: As a result of the legislation we passed and the circumstance where the Auditor General seeks to be involved with someone in the broader public sector, that is the engagement that is had.

I believe that the ministry may have been aware of this for approximately three weeks. Here are the steps that have been taken to address this. First off, we've seen that the Ontario Hospital Association, which has very clear responsibilities, put out a release that said, as the Auditor General noted in his report, that "hospitals we visited had general radiological policies based on the ALARA"—as low as reasonably achievable—"principle."

We are concerned, of course, with the detail of the report. Further to the work that the Ontario Hospital

Association has been involved in, we struck as of September a safety committee which will be reporting in 2007. Further, my deputy minister has called together three groups that have primary responsibility here: the Ontario Hospital Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, and the College of Medical Radiation Technologists of Ontario. I can assure all members that we will not rest until we've enhanced the capacity to provide—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: The Auditor General says that 94% of referring paediatricians underestimated the amount of radiation children faced when getting CT scans and that hospitals performing pediatric CTs did not keep records of young patients receiving multiple CT scans.

Minister, you may want to change your tune today. You said yesterday you had known about the situation for three months but you did not warn the public until the Auditor General blew the whistle yesterday.

I say this to the Premier: Between the day the minister found out unsuspecting children were being exposed to dangerous levels of radiation and yesterday, when the Auditor General blew the whistle, can the Premier tell us how many children underwent CT scans in that three-month period of time?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The work of the Auditor General relates to three particular hospitals where his staff conducted an investigation. Over the course of several months, one anticipates that the Auditor General and his staff were in touch with those hospitals. So awareness in the hospitals in particular where the concerns had been raised has been longstanding. One assumes that appropriate action was taken on their part.

The ministry's response to this has been related to drawing to the attention of and ensuring that those who are responsible for these actions—those are the groups I mentioned earlier, the Ontario Hospital Association and the two colleges, recognizing that the staff people who are administering this work are members of regulated health professions. Accordingly, my deputy minister is bringing those parties together, and as we move forward through the work of the safety committee which had been struck as of September 2006, Ontario will be in a position to have moved forward with guidelines that do not exist in any other jurisdiction. We depend upon these front-line health care providers, who are regulated; we depend upon the Ontario Hospital Association for the actions that are taking place in their environments. Through the work of our deputy minister, we are ensuring that they move—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.
1500

Mr. Hampton: The Auditor General indicated yesterday that the Minister of Health and his officials knew in September about these dangerous levels of radiation. But we shouldn't be surprised. The Auditor General showed that the minister's wait-time ads can't be trusted either.

Now your reporting on patient safety is the issue. Over one million people had CT scans last year. Many of them

were children, and the Auditor General says that 20% of the diagnostic imaging tests, including MRIs and CTs, are not even clinically appropriate, which means that you may have had up to 200,000 getting CT scans when they may not have needed them.

Patients deserve to be told about the risks involved in this procedure. Can the minister tell us: What action have you taken to notify all of those parents whose children were exposed to unsafe levels of radiation this fall? Have you taken any steps to explain the health risks?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: First off, I will say to the honourable member again, with respect to the notice period, that he is inaccurate, and he is informing the House even after he has been told of that. I think that is a very, very important point.

We have created a law that allows the Auditor General to look harder, to go further and to highlight areas of concern. He has done that in a very instructive way, and in fact he was involved with those three particular hospitals through his staff. Further to that, we're working, through the auspices of our deputy minister and through a committee that has been struck to look at the safety of the administration of radiation services, to ensure that Ontario, going forward, has a standard no other province can point to.

The honourable member speaks about clinical appropriateness. I can say too that through the expert committee, which is chaired by Dr. Anne Keller, we're working very vigorously. We're proud that we've enhanced access to these diagnostic services. We agree that these regulated health professionals must be doing their work in concordance with all of the best guidance and regulations. That that has not occurred in every instance—

The Speaker: Thank you.

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. We've heard today, again, a lot of words about the taxpayers' money and protection of the taxpayers' money. We heard the minister talking about the integrity of the corporations over in the power generation and distribution sector being maintained. We haven't heard something that's equally important: about the integrity of the broader public sector and any shred of accountability we can see being exercised here. The taxpayers are simply fed up with hearing these kinds of statements that say, "We understand, we feel your pain and we know why you're upset," and then that is followed by precisely nothing being done about it.

So my question is very simple: What specific steps have you taken to bring forward the report we asked for eight months ago about the bonus that Mr. Parkinson received for half a million dollars, without explanation, and what specific steps are going to be taken about the \$50,000 in expenses we heard about in the Auditor General's report yesterday? Specifically, what are you going to do about it?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of the Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): Specifically, I met yesterday afternoon, upon receipt of the report, with the chair of Hydro One. I meet with the chair on a monthly basis. In addition, I have reviewed all of the auditor's recommendations. A number of them have been acted upon already. There is more to do, and we will do that.

In addition, I should point out, since the Leader of the Opposition did reference OPG, that I have also had a meeting with Mr. Epp—albeit over the telephone. A number of the auditor's recommendations have been acted upon. There are a number left to do.

I have also directed Mr. Epp and Ms. Burak to go beyond the auditor's recommendations and look at a number of other areas that I think we should be looking at in this context. I will report to the House in the fullness of time with respect to the resolution of those issues.

Finally, we continue to deal with the matters on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Tory: I would say respectfully to the Premier that when he chooses not to stand in his place and answer these direct questions with respect to something that goes right to the accountability that the Premier of Ontario must show for every dollar of taxpayers' money, every ministry, every policy, every corporation in the control of his government, it shows a failure to take accountability.

I would ask the Premier this: What is wrong with this course of action that you could have taken yesterday, if not long before? Instruct them to tell us now the basis upon which the bonus was paid. They should have known it when they paid it. Instruct them now to cut down on the number of corporate credit cards. Instruct them now to tighten the rules about the use of those credit cards. Instruct them now to impose sanctions on those who abuse the taxpayers' money and abuse those credit cards, and instruct them now to show some leadership in sanctioning the people who have abused the taxpayers' money and broken the rules. Why don't you tell them to do that today?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I wish the Leader of the Opposition had been here about three years ago. He might have told the previous government not to give Michael Gourley \$3.7 million in untendered contracts. He might have told the previous government not to give Paul Rhodes \$335,000 for strategic communications advice. OPG might not have been left in a bankrupt position. When we came in, we turned it around. It's profitable and giving money back to this province and to the rate-payers of Ontario.

This Premier has taken a leadership role in getting those companies back in order and in shape. We acknowledge that there is more to do. What did they leave? They left a bankrupt public utility. They left a utility that was bleeding \$100 million a month. It's now making money. Hydro One has had its credit rating increased three times under this Premier's leadership.

There's more to do; we're going to do it. And, by the way, we're going to deal with contracts that your government signed a few years ago. That's what we're going to deal with.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Stop the clock. Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Member for Simcoe–Grey. The member for Nickel Belt is waiting patiently to place her question.

HEALTH CARDS

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Premier. The Auditor General expressed [*inaudible*] yesterday about the lack of controls to ensure that only eligible Ontarians have OHIP cards. He said that there are more than “10,000 extra cards in ... regions that border the United States.” Secondly, that almost 12,000 OHIP cards were used in different regions across the province within a very short period of time, “possibly indicating that health card numbers were being used inappropriately.” Thirdly, that although the Ministry of Health's fraud program branch is staffed with OPP officers and fraud examiners, the branch had no mandate to conduct fraud audits and no access to health records that would allow them to investigate suspicious cases.

Premier, OHIP cards provide vital access to Ontario's health care services. What are you doing to protect them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I do want to thank again the Auditor General for the excellent work. I think that the OHIP system is one that has been the subject of lots of reports over time. It's large, and accordingly, it's very, very helpful to have that kind of a perspective.

I think that there is some progress to report. While there is more to be done, of course, over the course of the year or so that the investigation by the Auditor General was ongoing, the ministry has worked very, very vigorously to take those excess cards out of circulation. I can report to the honourable member that to date, 250,000 cards have been determined to be ineligible and therefore not active. As of October 1, 2006, the total number of valid and active health cards was 12.52 million, while Ontario's population is 12.69 million.

There is more work to do on this file. With the benefit of the report from the Auditor General, we will continue to move that forward. I think we've made good steps, and I want to thank the people from the ministry, who have been very diligent in this regard.

Ms. Martel: The question was, what is the government doing to protect OHIP cards?

Let me raise a very specific case with the Premier. A letter was sent to the Ministry of Health a week ago from Joanne Bruyere of Fort Francis. Joanne says, “A few weeks ago, I received an envelope in the mail from a company by the name of Medtronic [which included] two identification cards that state I received a pacemaker.”

1510

Joanne continues, "I called the company (and found out) the doctor who did the surgery ... the hospital it was done at ... (in Montreal, Quebec) ... and the date of the surgery."

"All the information on the card is my personal information, the only problem I have is I have never been to Montreal, have never seen this doctor and I don't have a pacemaker."

Joanne says, "I believe someone may be using my OHIP card fraudulently."

She's never lost her card; it's never been stolen. If things are getting better, how is it that Joanne's personal health information was so abused?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member has rather a little more experience than me at the presentation of information related to the health care system. But what I would say is that it is not appropriate ever to talk about an individual Ontarian's circumstances; that is, about the protection of personal information. If the honourable member would like to await a response in terms of the particular circumstances, we will work through that, but let me give one example which I think is noteworthy in terms of the verification work that the Auditor General called for.

In fairly recent order, we've gone from 200 to 10,000 letters per week that are going out to Ontarians verifying the information we have on file for them. I did suggest in my earlier answer that good progress has been made, but I agree that there is more work to be done. The report from the Auditor General gives us good advice in that regard and the people of Ontario should know that we'll be addressing it on point.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. The city of London has grown rapidly to become one of the largest municipalities in southwest Ontario. Many of my constituents have been residents and have seen it grow. They know that infrastructure investment is a particular priority there.

They know that the roads and highways that we drive on are essential to moving goods and keeping the economy strong. They know that universities and colleges that students in my riding attend are crucial for making sure that we are the smartest and the brightest we can be. They know that hospitals need to be up to date and that wait times decrease so that we stay healthy and have the best health care in the country. They know that these are the types of infrastructure investments we need in London and around the province.

London was neglected by the previous government. The Tory government didn't see infrastructure as a priority. They didn't see London as a priority. What is the McGuinty government doing to make sure that London is getting the infrastructure investment—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question's been asked. The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Not only has the question been asked, but this member, the member from London-Fanshawe, is a tireless advocate for more investment in his riding and more investment in his city. He's right, infrastructure is a priority and previous governments should have invested more. But Premier McGuinty knows, and I know, that infrastructure investment is key to the region, to southwestern Ontario and the city of London. That's why we've developed a plan. That's why we've developed ReNew Ontario, a \$30-billion infrastructure investment plan.

Hospital projects in the London area are a particular priority and are moving quickly; specifically, the redevelopment project at St. Joseph's acute ambulatory care facility; a new state-of-the-art facility for diagnostic radiology and nuclear medicine imaging at the London Health Sciences Centre; the renovations at the St. Joseph's hospital for a surgical and diagnostic imaging centre. The University of Western Ontario has received almost \$20 million to upgrade and build new facilities and there is our program to invest in southern Ontario highways, \$3.4 billion to help people and goods to get to and from—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Ramal: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that the McGuinty government is listening to the people of London and building new hospitals, roads and highways, and making sure our universities and colleges are—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Member for London-Fanshawe.

Mr. Ramal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—and making sure our universities and colleges have the buildings and equipment they need.

Since 2003, the people of London are finally seeing huge investments in their community. While I appreciate that London is receiving new investments in infrastructure, how can I demonstrate to my constituents that we are making real progress? They want more investments made in recreation centres so that young men and women have places to go to play sports, stay off the streets and maintain a healthy lifestyle. They want more investments made in our vulnerable people so that women and children have a place to go when they are in need. They want more investments made in their libraries, children centres and many places. Minister, you can tell my constituents what the McGuinty government is doing to make—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The member from London-Fanshawe has so much drive and enthusiasm when it comes to demanding more for his constituents, and I appreciate that this member is advocating for some of the most vulnerable in our society.

I know that it's important that we invest in health care, whether it is a \$5-billion health care program, a \$10-

billion program for schools, \$11 billion for transportation, but he knows, just as I do, that targeted investments in local communities yield big results. To that end, my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has made sure we've invested in affordable housing projects in London to help those London residents into a new home. My colleague the Minister of Health Promotion has made sure we've invested in recreation and sports centres so that our children have places to play and go after school. My colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services has invested in treatment centres for children so that our most vulnerable can get the help they need. These are the types of targeted investments that make a huge difference in the lives of people.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): Speaking of the Minister of Children and Youth Services, this question is for her. Yesterday the minister acknowledged that she first learned her department traded kids for cars in October. She also indicated her deputy minister knew of the AG's report in September. That raises a lot of questions about this minister's competency. She stood by when children's aid societies spent \$60,000 on luxury cars, \$2,500 on gym memberships and \$150 on car washes. She abandoned risk assessments, cancelled financial reviews, ignored quarterly reports, and now we learn from the minister, who is supposedly responsible, that she learned a whole month after her deputy did of the misappropriation of tax dollars to protect Ontario's most vulnerable kids.

Who's responsible for her department? Is it her or is it her deputy?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): The member from Nepean–Carleton is just a little bit too sensational and a little bit less than accurate in what she's saying. Let me tell you what we're doing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. I need to be able to hear the minister respond. Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I actually insisted on receiving a draft copy of the report early in October and got personally involved in that right away. That's why our action plans in my ministry and, in fact, for children's aid societies actually reflect activities that are already underway, some of which have already been completed.

One of the action items in my ministry is the creation of a new accountability office, which will be in place in January and will monitor whether children's aid societies are meeting their legislative requirements for the care and protection of children and ensure corrective action is taken as needed. That office will also assess and report on agency—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. MacLeod: Too bad we couldn't have a little bit more compassion and a little less condescension from the

minister. It's about what she wasn't doing then, not about what she's professing to do now. This minister is either responsible for her department or not. By all accounts, she was asleep at the switch or she just didn't care that her department was grossly mishandling tax dollars meant for children at risk. The minister has a lot to answer for.

After all this time, since September when her deputy minister found out and October since the minister herself found out, can the minister inform this House who has been held responsible for the shameful antics in her department? Who has been fired? Who will stand up and take responsibility? Or is she waiting for someone else to stand up and take responsibility? Let us know, Minister.

1520

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Let me tell you a little bit more about what my ministry is doing. I'm really very pleased that my ministry's actions actually go well beyond what the Auditor General has asked us to do. We're accepting and implementing all of his recommendations, and he has actually expressed satisfaction with the fact that we are doing all of what we are doing.

The accountability office will also provide my ministry staff with the training and tools they need to provide better oversight and create a new culture of continuous improvement for CASs. We're also requiring children's aid societies to meet higher standards, as non-discretionary as those of the Ontario public service for its own employees and programs in such areas as the procurement of goods and services, travel, meals and other expenses, hospitality, and the management of fleet vehicles; and to conduct an independent assessment of the fleet requirements of children's aid societies, so that where less expensive alternatives exist, CASs will be directed to relinquish vehicles as quickly and economically as possible—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Premier. Premier, yesterday's Auditor General report is a scathing indictment of your failure to stand up for Ontario's children, who you are supposed to be protecting. There was no government oversight while children's aid society executives spent a billion dollars and at-risk children waited too long for help. Your government ignored reports, cut reviews and failed to uphold its duty to oversee the spending practices of children's aid societies. You claim to be taking action, but the auditor says that you failed to act on his last report on child welfare six years ago.

Children cannot wait another six years, Premier. Will you ask the Auditor General to conduct another audit of children's aid societies and the child welfare system next year, so that the people of Ontario are able to judge for themselves whether corrective measures have actually been taken by your government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The member from Hamilton East probably wasn't here for my statement yesterday, so

I will just remind her that the statement actually included a comment that I am also inviting the Auditor General to undertake a follow-up audit of these four CASs in 2007 to assess the progress that has been made.

There is no question that the findings and recommendations in the Auditor General's report represent a real opportunity for everyone involved in the child welfare and protection system to work together to strengthen it. There is an attitudinal change that is occurring, an understanding that this is a new day, a new era, and that there are higher standards to be met. Let me just—

The Speaker: Response?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I will stop here. In the supplementary, I'll speak a little bit more about what we're doing.

Ms. Horwath: The last-minute CAS damage control office that the minister announced, quite frankly, doesn't go far enough, in our opinion. Your government has to live up to its responsibilities under the new law to protect and care for children at risk. Vulnerable children are being left in harm's way because of what observers call lackadaisical care, abysmal record-keeping, weak oversight and questionable spending on cars and holidays.

You've misguidedly said no to Ombudsman oversight of children's aid societies, but will you definitely ask the Auditor General to conduct another audit of children's aid societies and the whole child welfare system to ensure your government's complicity won't put vulnerable children at risk again?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'm realizing that the member from Hamilton East is not really listening to the answers, but I will repeat some of them.

One of the things that I'm proudest of is the fact that it was our government that extended the powers of the Auditor General so that we could understand what was going on in places like the children's aid societies, and also that we would be able to make sure that we're taking the appropriate actions to ensure that there is a higher standard of care and a higher standard of efficiency and effective management of taxpayers' dollars in this sector. So I will certainly look forward to a follow-up audit of children's aid societies and the child protection system next year.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, I often hear from my constituents how difficult it is to access government services. We all know that you can look in the blue pages in any phone book, but for most people it's hard to find the numbers they need, and even if they do find the right numbers to call, they don't always find what they're looking for. Consider how this could be especially difficult for newcomers to Ontario or those individuals whose first language may not be English or French. In particular, many job seekers are unaware of the variety of employment and training services offered by our gov-

ernment and are unsure of where to go or how to access them. Minister, to solve this problem, you recently launched Employment Ontario, Ontario's employment and training network. My question is, how will Employment Ontario benefit job seekers in my riding, and in particular those who are newcomers to Ontario?

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'd like to thank the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh for his hard work in trying to make the system more usable for the people who need it, whether they're businesses or individuals. Employment Ontario is the place to start when you don't know where to start. It brings together the 470 different service providers in 900 locations across the province of Ontario and ensures that no matter where you are, you can find the services easily. You access them through a 1-800 number and they will provide you the services in the community—such as Cornwall—dealing with everything from simple job advice to literacy services, upgrading services, enhanced skills training or apprenticeship services. If you happen to be an employer, you can access it through a website—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I know there are people in the parties opposite who don't really care about making the system user-friendly, but at the end of the day it's not about the programs, it's about the workers and the businesses that need to access them, and that's why we've brought in Employment Ontario. We're making government work for the people of Ontario, not for the government.

Mr. Brownell: We know that over 70% of all new jobs in Ontario require some form of post-secondary education or training. In an age where technological innovation is one of the key sources of productivity gains, Ontario needs an increasingly skilled workforce to attract business and compete for the jobs that will help the province prosper. In the global race for talent, employers are constantly looking for skilled workers who will keep their companies competitive in their sector. Minister, how does Employment Ontario help individuals who may not already have the education or training necessary to compete for the types of jobs that Ontario needs to sustain economic growth?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: For example, if a worker in Cornwall is looking for job advice, they might not know about the Job Connect office in Cornwall and the additional funds we've put in there to support enhanced services. So they call the Employment Ontario number and tell them where they're looking and what issue they're looking for. Or if they're looking for pre-apprenticeship programs, they might not know about the announcement that was just released by the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh about enhanced services there. You can call Employment Ontario. Or if they're looking for academic upgrading, for example—one of the additional almost 5,000 people in the province of Ontario who will

benefit from this—where would they start? They can call Employment Ontario and they'll be referred on. Or if they're looking at the great programs at St. Lawrence College's campus in Cornwall, they can phone Employment Ontario and be directed to exactly what they need in the way they need it. That is the way that the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh is making government programs work for the people in his constituency.

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, earlier this year when you were asked by people driven into unemployment by your government about the escalating rates of electricity that you guys have been responsible for, your answer was to get some red wine and some warm blankets. Now, what are you telling these people when the auditor is telling us that the CEO of Hydro One was able to avoid the board of directors scrutiny of his expenses by having them put on his secretary's credit card, which certainly gives the appearance of trying to launder one's expenses through someone else: over \$50,000 being put on a secretary's credit card because he knew that if he put it on his, he would have to have the scrutiny of the board.

What are you telling working families and people out of work in Ontario about your electricity policies, and what are you going to do about what happened at Hydro One, with \$50,000 of expenses put on a secretary's credit card?

1530

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): First of all, I'll tell the citizens of Ontario that the price of electricity is lower now than when we took office. We'll tell them that first. That's from the Independent Electricity System Operator.

I indicated earlier in the House that we take these matters very seriously. That's why we asked the auditor to go in and look at Hydro One and OPG. That's why we brought in freedom of information, unlike the government you were part of. That's why we provided for salary disclosure.

There is more work to be done. I have met with the chairs of both OPG and Hydro One. We will act in the interests of consumers in this province, in a timely and responsible fashion, as I did when we moved to clean up the mess your government left at OPG. These issues are complex. They seem easy on the face. We pledged to the people of Ontario that we would manage the electricity system in a responsible fashion. We will address these matters in both a responsible and a timely—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Yakabuski: Minister, the electricity rates paid by working families and those forced out of work by your government in this province are up some 50% since you took office. So we'll get that one straight right off the bat.

You talked about disclosure. Earlier this year, you talked about disclosure with regard to why the CEO of Hydro One was paid a \$500,000 bonus. We have heard nothing on that. Now we would like some disclosure with regard to your quote to CP yesterday that heads could roll if you don't get some answers. Whose heads at Hydro One are you talking about? Certainly not the poor secretary who was just doing what she was told. I'd like to know whose head is going to roll at Hydro One if you don't get some answers, and when might we expect the answers?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government will act in the best interests of Ontario consumers, in a timely and responsible fashion. With regard to the options the government has, there are a number, and we're looking at them. That's why I met with the chair of Hydro One; that's why I met with the chair of OPG.

One of the things this government is most proud of is that we took a virtually bankrupt OPG, and now it's making money for the people of Ontario and paying down the unfunded liability to the tune of \$1.1 billion this year. Hydro One has had three credit rating increases this year alone. We are going to continue to make progress. We have begun to address the auditor's report, and we will take appropriate steps, in a timely fashion, to address the issues that have been raised by the Auditor General in his report.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. On October 24, I submitted a petition to this House, in your direction, about the sorry state of affairs in the city of Vaughan, the so-called city above Toronto, whose residents today are calling it the city above the law.

Vaughan citizens have begged you through the petition, through letters, through people coming into your office and meeting with your staff, and in front of news conferences to investigate years of allegations of suspected wrongdoing in their city.

On November 24, one of your staffers met with a delegation who outlined their concerns. They then held a press conference, and your staffers were at that press conference here at Queen's Park.

Minister, will you come to the aid of these citizens and order an investigation, as you have been petitioned to do?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I thank the member very much for the question. Let me just say that we're very pleased that the duly elected council for the city of Vaughan was sworn in the other day. Elections were held there, just like they were everywhere else in the province. It was a very close election for the position of mayor. A recount was done, and the result speaks for itself.

As the member well knows, the municipal clerks are responsible for the administration of the municipal elections. We're very pleased that all of the numerous elections that took place across the province of Ontario,

many of them in tight races, were conducted in as expert a fashion as they were. I think we should congratulate the municipal clerks clear across this province for running really, truly democratic elections, allowing the people of the various municipalities to state who they want to serve in councils for the next four years, and we're pleased with that.

Mr. Prue: I think the minister must have had the wrong briefing note. I'm not talking about the election; I'm talking about their request to investigate alleged wrongdoings in the city of Vaughan.

We've heard about years of alleged questionable practices in the city of Vaughan. The recent municipal election was marred with nastiness, yes, but that's not what this question is about. Vaughan citizens have elected a new mayor and I'm glad that she has been sworn in, but Mayor Jackson wants to get to the bottom of the allegations. The number one thing she said on being sworn in is that she wants your help to hold a public inquiry into what has happened in her city.

Minister, my question is very simple: Will you respond to the mayor of Vaughan and the good citizens of that city today and order an immediate investigation into their city's affairs?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: As the member has already stated, a member from my ministry met with the delegation, and it was attended by members of my staff as well. We're looking at the petition, we're studying it currently, but as the member also knows, the individual who had a lot to say about what was going on apparently in Vaughan, according to some individuals, is now the duly elected mayor of Vaughan, and obviously she can conduct whatever investigations she wants internally, to look at any matter as it relates to that municipality. We believe that's the best way to go about it, but we will certainly, in our ministry, assist however we can in order to make the city of Vaughan function as the citizens of Vaughan obviously would want it to.

TOURISM

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): My question is for the Minister of Tourism. Minister, judging by the cold weather and snow that we've seen over the last few days—and certainly we've had a lot of snow in North Bay—it feels like winter has certainly arrived. I know that a lot of my constituents are looking forward to their upcoming holidays and wondering what new and exciting events and activities they can partake of during our vacation time.

In my riding of Nipissing, there is an abundance of great things for residents and tourists to enjoy. I'd like you to share, Minister, what other events and attractions are available for people travelling throughout northern Ontario over our winter months.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): That was a great question, and I have some information for the member right here.

Northern Ontario is full of exciting and enjoyable things to do in the winter months. For people travelling through northern Ontario on snowmobiles or looking for cross-country skiing, there's an abundance of trails throughout the north and throughout the entire province for people to get out and enjoy.

In addition, the north is host to many winter festivals and events. Visitors can get their hands on some of the greatest snow on earth at the Ontario Winter Carnival Bon Soo in Sault Ste. Marie or jump back in time at Fort William Historical Park in Thunder Bay for the delightful recreation of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.

Tours of the sugar bush, horse-drawn hayrides, ice climbing, snowshoeing, polar bear watching and outdoor adventures are around every corner of the north. Hidden gems of winter enjoyment are found throughout northern Ontario.

PETITIONS

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have just been handed this petition with about 2,000 names on it from many ridings in Toronto here. It's to the Parliament of Ontario.

"Whereas citizens should have the right to make informed decisions about how, where and by whom our food is grown and produced; and

"To prohibit the availability of raw milk to those of us who take responsibility for our own health and inform ourselves about how to best do that is a basic violation of our right to make informed choices;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to:

"—have Minister Ramsay return all the equipment, documents and other items removed from Glencolton Farm; and

"—have the government agree to be financially liable for the personal property of cow shareowners; and

"—agree in writing that Glencolton Farm is to be free to carry on its service to the cowshare owners until and unless all of the issues have been dealt with in court or in the Legislative Assembly or Parliament of Ontario."

Again, these came from and around Toronto.

1540

TUITION

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I have a petition here signed by a number of people from communities up around my riding, from Kapuskasing, the Mattice area, and it reads as follows:

"To Stop Tuition Fee Hikes and Improve Access and Quality In Post-Secondary Education

"Whereas the Ontario Liberal government cancelled the tuition fee freeze after only two years and approved fee increases of up to 36% over the next four years; and

"Whereas tuition fees in Ontario have increased by more than four times the rate of inflation over the past 15 years; and

"Whereas a majority of Ontarians oppose tuition fee increases and support greater public funding for colleges and universities; and

"Whereas improvements to student financial assistance are undermined by fee increases; and

"Whereas the Ontario government's recent increase to student loan limits is set to push student debt to approximately \$28,000 for a four-year program; and

"Whereas per-student investment in Ontario still lags significantly behind the vast majority of jurisdictions in North America;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to stop tuition fee hikes and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"—reduce tuition fees to 2004 levels for all students in Ontario and implement an immediate tuition fee freeze;

"—increase public funding for post-secondary education to promote access and quality;

"—expand access to financial aid in Ontario, especially for part-time students; and

"—double the number of upfront, need-based grants for Ontario students."

I've signed that petition.

REGULATION OF ZOOS

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I would like to present a petition that says:

"Whereas Ontario has the weakest zoo laws in the country; and

"Whereas existing zoo regulations are vague, unenforceable and only apply to native wildlife; and

"Whereas there are no mandatory standards to ensure adequate care and housing for zoo animals or the health and safety of animals, zoo staff, the visiting public or neighbouring communities; and

"Whereas several people have been injured by captive wildlife and zoo escapes are frequent in Ontario; and

"Whereas these same regulatory gaps were affirmed recently by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in his annual report;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP David Zimmer's bill, the Regulation of Zoos Act."

I have literally hundreds if not thousands of signatures here. I am happy to put my name on the petition.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): "Whereas Longfields and Davidson Heights in south Nepean are some of the fastest growing communities ... in Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has voted to authorize the final design phases for a grade

7 to 12 school to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario has lifted a three-year moratorium on school closings in order to make way for new educational facilities;

"We, residents of Nepean-Carleton, petition the Parliament of Ontario to ensure that the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board continues with plans to build a new grade 7 to 12 school no later than autumn of 2008 to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities."

I support this and affix my signature.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition from Anne Deveau of Levack, Ontario. It's been signed by a number of people in my riding. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government were elected based on their promise to rebuild public services in Ontario;

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close the Rideau Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

"Whereas closing the Rideau Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities;

"Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of the Rideau Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep the Rideau Regional Centre open as a home for people with developmental disabilities and to maintain it as a 'centre of excellence' to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live."

I've affixed my signature to this.

BOMBARDIER IN THUNDER BAY

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I have a petition with over 2,000 signatures on it from Thunder Bay and surrounding area which reads as follows:

"Whereas the previous government of Canada made a commitment of approximately \$200 million to fund the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) contract for subway cars to be built at Bombardier in Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government has confirmed its commitment to fund approximately \$200 million as the provincial share of the TTC contract at Bombardier in Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas this contract will create approximately 300 jobs for five years in the city of Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas our government should be committed to supporting the use and expansion of mass transit to benefit our environment and our economy; and

"Whereas Toronto city council has awarded the TTC contract to Bombardier in Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas Ministers Flaherty and Cannon have been advised by our local MPP of the need for federal funding for the TTC contract at Bombardier in Thunder Bay;

"We, the undersigned, residents of Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario, call upon the government of Ontario to petition the government of Canada to meet the commitment of the previous federal government to fund the TTC contract for subway cars to be built at Bombardier in Thunder Bay."

I support this petition and I sign it.

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm receiving more and more petitions to do with the dam at Mary Lake and Port Sydney. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that has been sent to me by workers at SEIU. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, in June 2003, Dalton McGuinty said Ontario Liberals are committed to ensuring that nursing home residents receive more personal care each day and will reinstate minimum standards, and inspectors will be required to audit the staff-to-resident ratios; and

"Whereas Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, in October 2004, said that the Ontario government will not set a specified number of

care hours nursing home residents are to receive each day; and

"Whereas Ontario nursing home residents still receive the lowest number of care hours in the Western world; and

"Whereas studies have indicated nursing home residents should receive at least 4.1 hours of nursing care per day; and

"Whereas a coroner's jury in April 2005 recommended the Ontario government establish a minimum number of care hours nursing home residents must receive each day;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario immediately enact a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of nursing care for each nursing home resident per day."

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have a petition today to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

"Access to Trades and Professions in Ontario

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas many volunteer fire departments in Ontario are strengthened by the service of double-hatter firefighters who work as professional, full-time firefighters and also serve as volunteer firefighters on their free time and in their home communities; and

“Whereas the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association has declared their intent to ‘phase out’ these double-hatter firefighters; and

“Whereas double-hatter firefighters are being threatened by the union leadership and forced to resign as volunteer firefighters or face losing their full-time jobs, and this is weakening volunteer fire departments in Ontario; and

“Whereas Waterloo–Wellington MPP Ted Arnott has introduced Bill 52, the Volunteer Firefighters Employment Protection Act, that would uphold the right to volunteer and solve this problem concerning public safety in Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the provincial government express public support for MPP Ted Arnott’s Bill 52 and willingness to pass it into law or introduce similar legislation that protects the right of firefighters to volunteer in their home communities on their own free time.”

I have affixed my signature.

1550

TUITION

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition sent to me by the University of Toronto Students’ Administrative Council. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario Liberal government cancelled the tuition fee freeze after only two years and approved fee increases of up to 36% over the next four years; and

“Whereas tuition fees in Ontario have increased by more than four times the rate of inflation over the past 15 years; and

“Whereas a majority of Ontarians oppose tuition fee increases and support greater public funding for colleges and universities; and

“Whereas improvements to student financial assistance are undermined by fee increases; and

“Whereas the Ontario government’s recent increase to student loan limits is set to push student debt to approximately \$28,000 for a four-year program; and

“Whereas per-student investment in Ontario still lags significantly behind the vast majority of jurisdictions in North America;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students’ call to stop tuition fee hikes and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“—reduce tuition fees to 2004 levels for all students in Ontario and implement an immediate tuition fee freeze;

“—increase public funding for post-secondary education to promote access and quality;

“—expand access to financial aid in Ontario, especially for part-time students; and

“—double the number of upfront, need-based grants for Ontario students.”

I affix my signature to this.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly regarding access to trades and professions in Ontario. I’d like to thank Imran Pirzada of McFarren Boulevard in Mississauga for sending it to me. It reads as follows:

“Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

“Whereas action by Ontario’s trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario’s trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario’s regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario’s employers, Ontario’s newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families.”

I’m pleased to support and sign this petition and to ask page Andrew to carry it.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): The petitions in support of the Homestead Act keep rolling in, like this one signed by Roger and Jean Robert of Fenwick and Edith McLean of Beamsville, that reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas property assessments are skyrocketing across the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ombudsman's recent report was scathing in his criticism of the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. (MPAC); and

"Whereas increasing assessments, taxes, utility costs and gas prices have made it increasingly difficult to make ends meet; and

"Whereas the Homestead Act as proposed by Erie-Lincoln MPP Tim Hudak will cap assessment increases to 5% per year while home ownership is maintained, allow home improvements of up to \$25,000 per year without an assessment increase and contains a property tax break for seniors and the disabled;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Homestead Act into law."

In support, my signature.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (LEARNING TO AGE 18), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (APPRENTISSAGE JUSQU'À L'ÂGE DE 18 ANS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 29, 2006, on the motion for third reading of Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning / Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant l'apprentissage des élèves jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans et l'apprentissage équivalent.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I am here with my colleagues. The member from Nickel Belt will probably speak on this bill as well near the end of today's session. It's good that she's here because we need a lot of speakers to speak to this bill. We have a lot of concerns.

New Democrats have opposed this bill from the very beginning.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Shame.

Mr. Marchese: I'll explain why to you, David.

Bill 52 requires students to stay until age 18. If they haven't finished their grade 12 degree, they won't be able to leave, they're going to have to stay until age 18. We say that government—particularly the Liberal government—does things that are politically expedient but often are not pedagogically effective, and this is one such bill.

While it is a laudable goal to say students should stay until age 18—and who wouldn't want any student to stay until age 18, or 19 or 20 or 21 or 22 or 23 or 26, or even later than that? Which parent wouldn't want their chil-

dren to stay as long as they could in high school, of course, and then beyond, in college and university? Who wouldn't? There might be some, but my suspicion is that parents want their kids to stay in school. So the government presents it as if somehow the opposition that opposes this is giving up on students while, oh, no, they are not giving up on these students. They've got this creative law, Bill 52, that will address the problems that we have had in terms of dropouts, with students at risk in particular, for a long time.

I want to do a little review of the bill because those of you who are watching often don't get a complete sense of what we're talking about. This bill originally said, "We're going to force students to stay until age 18," unless of course they got their grade 12 degree by age 16, and, "We're going to penalize them in a variety of ways if they don't do what the bill proposes." They were going to force students to lose their licence if they left school without having their degree. They were not going to be able to get their licence unless they did their degree. That was the first fear and threat that they imposed and presented in the original bill.

They then said to parents, "If you knowingly keep your child out of school, we're going to fine you 1,000 bucks." That jumped from the \$200 that the Tories had to \$1,000, as proposed by the original bill of the Liberal Party. It was intended to get tough, even on parents, and it was going to fine students, up from the \$200 to \$1,000, because they felt that they needed to be tough on students as well. Then they were going to get tough with employers. If employers knowingly hired someone who should have been in school, they were going to get a fine, up from 200 bucks under the Tories to 1,000 under the Liberals.

We thought, "This sounds pretty dumb." Why would you punish students, especially students who are having a difficult time in school, with a possible fine of 1,000 bucks? Why would you, of all people, fine parents? I suspect most parents want their kids to go to school. You then put a proposal to suggest that they would be fined 1,000 bucks if they somehow knowingly kept their kids away from school. And why would you punish employers? The idea was, of course, that this government was so serious about keeping kids in school that they were willing to accept any measure that would keep them in the school system. We said then that it was dumb; we say it now. People said in the hearings that it was a dumb idea. To be fair, the government listened to that.

1600

I propose to you that the government never really intended for that to be the object of the government's interest. In my view, it was a decoy. It was a distraction. It was a red herring. The government really didn't care about the issue of the fine, and the government really didn't care about the issue of the driver's licence. What they really cared about was the third part of this bill, which is the equivalent learning program.

I know that the parliamentary assistant had some concerns about this bill, to be sure. But I am not sure that he

and others were quite aware of what the former minister, Monsieur Kennedy, had in mind when he introduced it. The real objective of this bill has to do with equivalent learning programs, of which I will speak much more as I get on with my discourse here on this particular issue. The point of it all is that they want to introduce these equivalent learning programs as a way of making sure that they reduce the dropout rate for students at risk in particular. The bill is about how to keep kids in school. The political motivation is how they can show that the dropout rate under the Liberals has diminished as a result of this great bill. That is really the point, and how to get to it is the equivalent learning program.

People like me attack the whole issue of students being penalized by not being able to get their licence, because so many argued, "Imagine, students who, for so many different reasons, have to drop out of school and would need to drive a car would be penalized doubly by not being able to drive a car, particularly if they are in rural or northern areas." People spoke to that. People spoke to the idea of fining parents and fining students and fining employers as being a silly idea. So the government had to listen.

But I suggest that it wasn't listening that was the issue here; the real question was the equivalent learning programs. The equivalent learning programs are programs that are offered outside of the educational system, what we and teachers are saying has to do with contracting out programs to people outside of the educational systems who are not teachers and are not intended to be teachers—and I will show later on that the government really doesn't want them to be teachers.

What's the real issue that the government hasn't talked about? Why is it that students drop out? Surely there must be a reason. The government never assessed that particular problem. The government never spoke to why it is that students drop out. The government never once mentioned anything to do with that perhaps there are serious educational difficulties students have that the educational system never dealt with, that if you allow them to happen for a long time, become much more difficult to deal with. That's a real issue. Not once did the minister or the parliamentary assistant or any of the committee Liberal members talk about the educational difficulty that a student might be having as one of the fundamental reasons why some students, after age 16, drop out. Not once did the minister or the Liberal members of that committee talk about, perhaps, psychological problems that students might have, mental illness problems that students might have. Not once did they talk about substance abuse that might have originated in the home or the mom or dad or both and that they might have picked up as being part of that environment. Nobody talked about alcohol or sexual abuse as being things that could traumatize students to the extent that, if it's not dealt with by the age of 16, students simply want to leave the system.

Not once did the government speak about those real problems, and unless we deal with educational problems,

which can be severe in many cases, unless we deal with psychological or mental illness problems and unless we deal with economic issues that some students have, particularly as it relates to poverty, we're not really dealing with the problem.

You won't be able to hold many students back at age 17 unless you've dealt with these problems. I made this point over and over again in committee, urging the government to deal with the issue of the lack of youth workers that we've had in the Ontario system, youth workers who deal with troubled students. Because of their ability to relate and to communicate to these students, they were able to hold them back. Because there was a youth worker working with either their psychological issues, mental illness issues or other economic problems they might have had, they were able to hold those students back.

Not once did I hear the government say, "We're going to deal with that." The Conservative government fired many of those youth workers, and you Liberals were going to bring them back. If you brought them back, it would indicate to me, to parents and to others that you're genuinely interested in dealing with kids at risk.

Not once did the Liberal membership of that committee talk about the technology programs that we have in our system and what to do about the fact that under the Conservative government these programs were decimated. You Liberals were interested, are interested, in bringing some of these technological, auto mechanics and aircraft programs back into our system.

We used to have a healthy system that provided alternative programs—decimated by the Tories and attacked by M. Kennedy when he was in opposition. Yet neither he nor the current minister or this government has ever said, "We're not only going to expand those programs but update the equipment of those programs so that students have current, up-to-date equipment to be able to learn whatever trade they're getting into." I never heard one man or woman in that committee talk about these things—not once.

We have lost industrial arts programs in the elementary schools. We used to have a lot of good programs in the elementary schools, getting students ready for programs other than academic ones so that they would have an early start at understanding that life isn't simply academic learning, but that other tactile trades lead not only to self-fulfillment but to jobs that are well-paying once they retire themselves out of the high school system, out of a college system or even out of a university system.

So I say to the government that if you want to reduce the dropout rate, bring back some of those counsellors. Bring back some of the social workers, some of the psychologists we used to have that dealt in schools, in situ, with these students. Bring them back. Bring back the youth workers. Bring back these technological programs, these trade schools that used to thrive many, many years ago.

And so the government says, "We love all of the different programs we offer. We think we have a great

system.” If you believe that, why is it that you are offering alternative programs, so-called “equivalent learning programs” outside of the educational system? If you are proud of your co-op programs and if you are proud of the pre-apprenticeship programs that you claim are so great, why not expand those programs? Nothing prevents you from doing that.

So you have to ask yourselves, and teachers and parents have to ask themselves, why are they doing it? They are doing it, my friends, because they want to contract out work to non-teachers. That’s what this is about. It’s contracting out work to non-teachers.

1610

The minister quotes Horace Mann when he says, “Education is the great equalizer of the conditions of man”—and he meant that for both sexes, I’m sure. She says that Bill 52 helps us to get there. How? How does Bill 52 allow us to get there, to be the great equalizer, when all you are doing is offering some programs, which I’ll of speak in a moment, that are presumably equivalent in nature, i.e., possibly as good as what we offer in the educational system? I tell you this: Education can be the great equalizer, but Bill 52 doesn’t do it. So to quote some famous individual and make it appear that, through such a quote, you are actually equalizing opportunities for all students by providing alternative programs—you’re not doing it. It’s just a whole lot of blah, blah, blah. That’s what I am trying to do in the hour that I’ve got, to expose the problems as articulated by the minister.

The minister says that 30,000 students, 16- and 17-year-olds, leave high school and put themselves in a deep hole. But the minister, as I said earlier, doesn’t address the reasons why they’re leaving. Then the minister adds, “We’re not going to give up on them.” Well, neither are we. That’s why we’re proposing that you actually provide the services to help these students to deal with the problems they’ve got. If the issues are poverty, then you’ve got to deal with that. That’s why we attacked the Liberal government when they claimed and said that they were going to get rid of the clawback of the national child benefit program; they didn’t, leaving more and more parents and their children in poverty. Deal with that, because if you can deal with that, and students come to school with a little more attention given to what they’re eating because they might have a couple of more bucks to buy some good, healthy things to eat, they might come to school a little bit more ready and prepared to learn. Deal with the poverty issues.

But you don’t do that. You don’t deal with the educational issues in a way that says to me that students who’ve got special needs are going to be dealt with. My colleague from Nickel Belt has been for years haranguing and attacking this government, in as aggressive a way as possible, saying that kids who have autism need help. The government claimed in opposition that they were going to do that; they get into power and they don’t. So families are left to their own devices, and they do not have the money to put them in a private system that could cost anywhere from \$10,000 to \$50,000. So it means that

students with special needs are not getting the attention they need. I tell you this: Bill 52 will not deal with the issue of autism and the issue of at-risk kids unless you provide the services to help.

You’re not dealing with the issue of mental illness unless you provide services. One in five students has a mental illness, and we have decried and attacked the government on a regular basis saying that they need resources, that we need resources. Unless you deal with those issues, those kids are at risk, and your believing that providing an alternative equivalent program at age 17 is going to deal with this—it does not, and you all know it, or at least you ought to know it. I think that if you’re thinking beings, you will conclude, as I have, that that measure of an equivalent learning program—a contracted-out program to some community service out there that will provide an equivalent program—just won’t do it. You all know it, I’m convinced of it; if you don’t, it’s worse. If you don’t know it, I think that we lack intellectual integrity in this place.

What does the minister offer to do? She said that she took a serious look at the high school system. That’s what she said. So when she said that last week, I wondered how she had looked at the system seriously, because nowhere in her comments and nowhere in this bill do I get a sense that she has studied fully the high school system.

She continues. She said she sought out top educators across the country—indeed, the world—and Bill 52, she argued further, comes out of academia and the front lines. Really? Which front lines are we talking about? Liberal front-bench lines? The back lines of the Liberal back-benches? Which front lines are we talking about? I’m telling you, there aren’t that many teachers I know and there aren’t that many academics I know—perhaps the minister knows some academics and front-line teachers who have proposed Bill 52. But I can guarantee you, listeners and citizens, teachers are not advocating for this. They’re not.

So I don’t know who this minister consulted, but they’re not front-line teachers, and I do not believe they are academics. I do not believe for a moment she has done a world study of this issue to conclude that Bill 52 is going to solve the problems of students at risk. So it’s laughable to me when she makes this claim. It undermines her; it really does. It undermines the minister to say, “I’ve looked at the system thoroughly. I have scurried the world and consulted magicians, possibly, certainly academics and other front-line folks to come up with Bill 52.”

Do you understand what I’m saying? They shouldn’t say those things. They should be modest in their proposal. They should say, “Yeah, we think Bill 52 might do it. We’re certainly trying. Yeah, it could; you never know. If we hold a couple of students back, maybe some of them will be able to take advantage of it. It might work for some of them.” If you said that, then I would say, “Yeah, okay, maybe it’s possible.” But when you exaggerate so badly, it only speaks to the fact that this is politically expedient and not pedagogically effective.

This bill is about saying to parents who have troubled kids, "Don't worry, we'll hold them back." Well, good luck. I hope you have a lot of good reins to hold them back. After I have explained about the educational difficulties and mental illness problems or psychological problems they might have had or any kind of abuse—substance or sexual—you don't get rid of that with an alternative program. Sorry, you're not going to do it.

Teachers know what kinds of programs work, she said. I don't know. What are they? They're not stated. Not once in committee and not once in this House did the minister ever make reference to any particular program that works, that I'm aware of, except to say that they work. Make it so, Minister, because I just don't see it. I don't see it from a front-line perspective. I don't see it from the New Brunswick perspective, where they actually did it and it has been proven to have had no effect—not even marginal; no effect. So as she scurried the world, including this country, to find some other province that has done this—New Brunswick has done it, and there is no positive effect, not even marginal, on those students. Good work, Minister, you and your team.

Then she scurried the world some more. I guess there are eight or nine states where they've done this and they hold students back till age 18, and some studies show that the result has been improved by 1.2%. We create a whole system, a whole bureaucracy to improve but by a little margin, 1.2%. Why would you do that? What academics have you consulted, for God's sake? Who are the experts—name them in this House—who would lead you fine Liberals to conclude you're on to something? New Brunswick and eight or nine states have done it; no improvement in Canada, marginal improvement in the US. You create a bureaucracy for that? I don't know. You understand, I lose faith in some of you.

1620

Interjection: Not all of us?

Mr. Marchese: Some of you are okay, I suppose.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): How about McNeely?

Mr. Marchese: I won't name names.

The minister goes on—she does. I think she actually spoke for 20 or 25 minutes. She said that "students do not benefit from a one-size-fits-all education...." Remarkable. I thought, yes, that's a good point. She said that "we know that every student does not learn like every other student." Okay. Good. I think she's right.

Why, then, is she still using the one-size-fits-all funding formula? The funding formula is a one-size-fits-all formula. How could the minister say, "Well, this bill allows students to learn in different places, different environments, because one size doesn't fit all," yet continue to use a Conservative funding formula that fits and slots everybody in the same way without taking into account differences in students and boards? And why is it that she has invented another formula for special ed which is called block funding?

The government has come up with a clever way of spending less money on special education. The intensive

support amount, which cost the government a great deal of money to provide the special education help—actually brought in by the Conservative government—was an \$890-million program. The Liberals have got a clever way of cutting that cost. They have eliminated the ISA, the intensive support amount, and they're now going to give block funding to schools, meaning that every school will get money not according to their different needs, but according to the number of students who are in that school, meaning that if you've got 100 kids with special education needs in one school, they're not going to get any extra money, because the Liberal government has come up with a unique formula for special ed, and it's called block funding.

If this government, this minister, says the one-size-fits-all doesn't work and says Bill 52 deals with it, how come she's still perpetuating an unequal funding formula and has now introduced a special education funding formula through block funding that makes it even more impossible for students to get the help they need and to have education be the great equalizer that the minister speaks about? If kids don't get the special help, education cannot be the great equalizer as la ministre claims.

We've got a transportation problem where, across this big province of ours, there are different needs. The one-size-fits-all formula doesn't work. Why doesn't the minister change that? Why does she use that phrase, "one-size-fits-all," loosely and forget that she is conflicted by so many other policies where that particular formula doesn't apply?

Maintenance programs: We don't distinguish between old schools and new schools. Why doesn't she fix that? The reason I say this is because she really doesn't believe this point about the one-size-fits-all; they use it, and they hope that the citizens watching will believe it. That's why I have to point out the contradictions, so that those of you who are watching and listening can see that what they say versus what they do is inconsistent.

She continues, "This bill would allow students to mould their educational journey to their own interests and natural skills." Well, what is wrong with the alternative programs that we provide now? Why not extend the programs that we offer now to more students, and why not deal with the problems that I raised earlier on to be able to give those students those better opportunities?

The minister says, on the last page, of my two minutes, "The member for Trinity-Spadina, on the other hand, needs to go out and talk to some of the people in our schools. He needs to talk to the folks at Central Tech, which I think is in his riding. He needs to talk to the folks who know that we've had an uptake in co-op programs because students can now count two co-op credits as mandatory credits. He needs to talk to the people in the schools who understand that the programs we're putting in place are indeed the substance of this student success initiative. He needs to talk to the teachers who are very happy that we're putting student success teachers"—and she goes on and on.

What she's saying is, she's proud of the alternative programs that she's offering in the system. Why, if you

feel strongly about the great things you are doing, would you then require to provide other programs outside of the educational system by contracting out those programs to other providers, and non-teachers at that? Why would you do that?

The minister says that I should go out and walk through Central Tech. By the way, I've walked through this place most of my life, so I'm quite familiar with the programs they have there. I even did my practice teaching at Central Tech. So when the minister says that I should go there, I tell her that she should take a little walk from here to Central Tech and do a little tour of the great programs Central Tech used to offer, and still offers, and that we should increase those kinds of programs that they're offering. So on the one hand she says, "Marchese has to go and see what we're offering," and on the other hand she says, "Ah, but we need other programs outside of the education system." I don't get it. And I wonder if my good friend Jim Bradley gets it.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I get it. I just think they should give you a question.

Mr. Marchese: I know. And it's so good to have you, Jim, just to remind the folks that we need to do that.

But more pertinent to this particular debate—because you were a former teacher as well, and you're on the front lines of this bench, by the way. The minister was talking about the front lines earlier on, and I suspect that you, as a front-line minister and as a front-line teacher, have no knowledge of what she speaks. And if you do, you don't support her. She claims you, on the front lines, understand that we need these programs outside of the educational system. I don't believe that.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Yeah, sure. As a former teacher, he knows, as I do and others—

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): You're a former teacher?

Mr. Marchese: I just said that, yes—that the front lines don't support what you're doing.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: They support the students.

Mr. Marchese: You're absolutely right: They support the students. We don't doubt that. That's not the debate, Dave. The debate is Bill 52. The debate—

Hon. Mr. Caplan: They didn't like the social contract.

Mr. Marchese: You crack me up, I'm telling you.

I hope that you good citizens are getting a fairly good sense of what we are talking about. OECTA, the Catholic teacher organization, and OSSTF, the public teacher federation across Ontario, have serious misgivings. The parliamentary assistant quotes from various papers that they have shown that they support the government. I am telling you that the majority of teachers have misgivings and many of the OSSTF members have misgivings, including the OECTA members.

I will read from the OECTA flyer that, yes, supports the government in so many ways. But at the end of this flyer, they say the following:

"OECTA believes that all secondary school credits must be assessed by certified teachers...."

"OECTA will vigorously oppose any use of unqualified instructors in place of certified teachers and rejects any erosion of the secondary diploma."

Actually, those are the only two lines that I agree with out of this OECTA flyer.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Read the rest.

Mr. Marchese: No, no. You'll have to do that for yourself. But I do remind you, for the benefit of the citizens that are watching, that they do not support, in large part, what this government is doing; that is, farming out, contracting out teacher positions to other outside providers.

Furthermore, because of the objections made by OECTA and OSSTF in particular, including individual teachers who came to Toronto and other hearings that we had, the government became very nervous. The then parliamentary assistant, now minister, must have realized that something had to be done to appease the teachers, to placate them somehow. So she, in the usual Liberal manner, had a meeting with them, not to console and not to placate, but to tell them that she really had some serious amendments that were going to deal with their issues. Let me tell you what they were.

1630

First of all, the fines are gone. As I say, they were never really intended to be serious.

The issue of licensing or getting their licence is now gone except for the serious offenders and serious, serious truancy, but that issue is gone. And that, I put to you, was a red herring from the beginning, so it wasn't a big deal. I know the parliamentary assistant might disagree with me on this, but I believe that it was never intended to be serious.

What remains out of this bill is the offering of equivalent learning programs. That's all that remains. It's that small.

What the minister did to appease, placate, pretend to be listening to the federations—this is what she did. She said that principals are now required to sign off. Once a program has been approved, the principal signs off. In my mind, as I see it, it gives the impression of legitimacy by having a principal approve it, but all it is is a stamp of approval. That's all it is. It makes it appear that principals are really actively involved in the program. Nothing of the sort. All that person is going to do, man or a woman, is a stamp of approval and it's done.

Second, the minister will now have to approve every program that's offered, every equivalent learning program that's offered, for one year. After the one year is up, member from Nickel Belt, the minister doesn't have to approve the individual programs anymore. Do you have a sense of why one year, member from Nickel Belt? Take a little guess.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): There's an election.

Mr. Marchese: Yes, you got it right. I knew she would find the answer in no time. You understand there's

going to be an election next October. That more or less gives you one year to get re-elected. After that one year, the minister doesn't have to sign off anymore on those individual equivalent learning programs, whatever they are. So you wonder. You wonder, if it's important to have the minister sign off and approve each program, why is it just for one year? And if it's not important, why do you include the minister signing off for the one year? It's all about politics. It's about making OECTA and OSSTF feel good. But the teachers got nothing out of those amendments, absolutely nothing. They got the illusion of something being done. It made them feel good so they could go back to their members and say, "We had a meeting with the minister and, boy, was she nice; boy, does she listen well; and, boy, does she understand." They go back to their places, wherever they may be, thinking they got something out of that deal, and they got nothing. It's pretty sad, actually. It's almost laughable. But I need to point it out. I need to point out the truth, and the truth is that they got nothing out of this deal.

The minister says, "Ontario publicly funded education will remain in public hands for the public good. Principals and teachers will remain the backbone...." I want to exfoliate that little remark, or that onion, as I often say.

Interjection: Exfoliate?

Mr. Marchese: Exfoliate. Isn't that a beautiful term? I love that term.

These programs are being offered outside of the educational system. It's not public; it's not in public hands. It's outside of the public system, outside of the principals, except they sign off, but that's hardly a big public deal. Just to sign off doesn't make it public, for God's sake. These programs are taken out, farmed out, contracted out, so it's not in public hands. The minister likes to say it to make it appear to the OSSTF organization and the Catholic organization, OECTA, that it's still in public hands, but it isn't, you understand. It isn't. That's the brilliancy of the Liberal government: making it appear that they're doing some positive, but in reality that toolbox is empty.

Let me tell you, as I often like to say—it's funny to say it that way. I asked Ms. Goldberg in committee, "Can I ask you, is this the section where we would know whether the programs offered would be by certified teachers, or is there another section that will deal with it later?"

Ms. Goldberg replied, "I believe that it would be in the policies, standards and guidelines that will be issued under this section."

I replied, "So what we will get, and it's not clear here today but it's clear in your mind, under paragraph i of section 3.0.1, is, 'require that boards develop and offer equivalent learning opportunities to their pupils in accordance with the policies, guidelines or standards.' This is what you point to, to say that the equivalent learning programs will be provided by certified teachers."

Ms. Goldberg replied, "If that's done, it will be through those policies. I can't tell you right now what those policies—"

I said, "I understand: 'If that's done'; that's the question I'm asking you, because teachers are worried about that and so am I. You're saying, 'If that is done, it's not clear that it will be so.' You're saying, 'If that is done by the minister.'"

Nowhere in this bill does it require that the equivalent learning programs be taught by teachers—nowhere. And because it is not written, it is not the intention of this government and this minister to make it so, that those programs being taught outside of the educational system be taught by teachers. I put to you, teachers and citizens, that these programs will be taught by non-teachers. Why? It's about saving money. It's all about saving money. They will not be qualified teachers. We are not certain what kinds of programs there are going to be. We are not certain of the quality, except the minister is going to sign off. Big deal, because after next year, she no longer has to sign off.

They, not being teachers, do not do a security check, as other teachers do. They've got to do a criminal check, a security check, right? These people don't have to do that. We are throwing these programs out there and we are going to hope for the best. Is this the sort of equivalent learning we can expect from the McGuinty government, sending students to learn burgerology perhaps at McDonald's or handing out credits for completing barista training at Starbucks? What can we expect of these equivalent learning programs?

Oh, to be sure, the Liberals have big ideas, because they consulted academics, experts. They scoured the world to find Bill 52. To be sure, they know what they're talking about. And to be sure, they have a fairly good sense of what programs we're talking about. We, of course, don't share that light, because they haven't shared it with us, but at some point they will. To be sure, these programs will be of high quality, so that students will be able to stay in the school system, so that the government can then say, "Lo and behold, the student dropout rate has gone down." That's what this is about: to create an image of having reduced the dropout rate. That's what all of this is about, this little part of this bill that they kept, to show that the level of dropouts has gone down. I tell you, it's not going to work. I believe 101% that it's not going to work and I believe the Liberals—if they're following what I'm saying—will believe the same, assuming they're paying attention. Because it won't do it.

There are many other issues that I want to talk about. There is a letter that has been sent from Hamilton-Wentworth. This is interesting because I think it speaks to many of the problems that teachers are feeling and fearing. It's the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, so when I use the acronym, you'll know.

1640

Second, the HWDSB's board of trustees has significant concerns about equivalent learning, quality and accountability: "We realize that there are currently two credits for accreditation towards a secondary school diploma that can be earned outside the school system."

They continue: "Extending credits to other bodies outside the secondary school system causes the board of trustees some alarm. Without known criteria for recognition of what might be considered equivalent standing, the credits might not meet those requirements presently met by the secondary school or by the Royal Conservatory of Music. The purpose of the curriculum in place with the education system is to provide employees with identifiable benchmarks for learning and transparency in education.... Without these parameters, it is our opinion the proposed notion of equivalent learning will lead to educational opportunities that lack structure and rigour. Unfortunately, this aspect of the proposed legislation has the appearance that the government is comfortable outsourcing education.... How many certifications requiring even less hours of training would be bundled for credit value? What kinds of equivalent learning are going to be recognized?"

"The expansion of opportunities outside of the existing system could have devastating impacts on some optional courses in schools—music, dance, technology—which would lessen the accessibility of a range of courses available to all students. There is the potential that school boards might lose funding as eight of 30 credits could be provided outside the school system"—eight out of 30. "And there is the possibility that the concept of certified instructors, entrenched in the College of Teachers, could be undermined by parallel institutions with unqualified instructors setting up outside the school system to obtain equivalent credits for students.... In our opinion the best advantage for our students would be to build on these initiatives and have the means to do so with our most at-risk students."

I want to mention something else they said: "The Ministry of Education has been providing school boards, through the student success funding, the means to provide a wide range of flexible courses to meet a variety of student needs without sacrificing qualified teacher instruction or common Ontario evaluation standards. HWDSB has been experiencing tremendous success with this approach, as well as with its long-standing SALEP centre that reintegrates 80% of students back into the mainstream." Meaning that you are offering some programs that appear to be working, in the opinion of this board, and you should do more of that. What you're about to propose through Bill 52 undermines what you are currently doing.

They conclude, by saying, "Minister, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board applauds your efforts and desire to provide all secondary school students with good outcomes in preparation for a successful future." They even praise you. "We would appreciate, however, if the minister will reconsider those aspects of Bill 52 that deal with equivalent learning. HWDSB would prefer that the minister achieve these outcomes through the intent of language of the act by 'building on the creativity and strength of Ontario's educational system.'"

By the way, much of this was in the preamble, which I said on the first day of the debate was the best thing in this bill—your preamble. What this board is saying is,

deal with the strengths of the system you've got and make it better. Do not provide an equivalent learning program that is at the moment vague, uncertain, that will create the possibility of providing a whole lot of programs that will take students away from the high school system and put them into another equivalent, parallel program in the private system that simply doesn't guarantee the quality that we are looking for.

I'm urging those teachers who are watching today to put pressure on this government. I do not believe for a moment that what the federations got out of this minister does anything good for you, teachers, or for the system. I don't believe it for a moment. So I urge you to meet with your MPPs, present these problems to them and tell them that you disagree profoundly with the direction in which they are going and that there are consequences for them, should they consider this. This will affect the education of those students, based on the what we suspect is not higher learning, and by doing so, you will point out to the government that you have serious concerns.

We don't know about the quality of these programs. We have no clue. There's nothing written that would allow us to feel good about these programs. If, indeed, the government will allow eight credits to be taught outside of the educational system, it undermines public education, and that should be of serious concern to all the teachers. There's still time. We've got a couple more days here of debate, and there's time for you to be able to influence this government.

Governments only respond to pressure. That is the nature of the beast. If you do not apply pressure on governments, they simply carry on doing whatever they believe is correct. In this particular case, I believe they're wrong, and unless you tell them so, they think you, the front lines, are in agreement with them. Based on my discussions with most teachers I talked to on this bill, you do not agree with this government, and unless you tell them on a face-to-face basis, nothing will happen.

We've had some good debates on this bill, but the majority of people who came in front of the committee opposed it. The only ones who supported Bill 52 were the ones who are waiting to provide programs and make some money out of this deal. Those were the only service providers who were happy. This is not to denigrate them; that's not the issue. Many of these people provide programs—and I am certain there is a need for them—and it's not my intention to belittle what they do, except to say that they were the only ones happy with Bill 52. The majority of other deputants, including students, and yes, mostly teachers and federations, French-speaking from the French-speaking board, and the public and the Catholic, all expressed concern, in particular about the equivalent learning programs. They all spoke to that. That's why the government has desperately tried in their amendments to make the federations feel good.

I am of the view that more and more teachers, as they know about this, will become, if not enraged, pretty angry about what they've seen with this government over this bill. We urge them to fight back. What we need is to

communicate with many of you, by the way, so those of you who are watching and are teachers, just send us your e-mails so we can communicate with you. We need to tell you what we said about Bill 52. We've got it all there for you to read, so if you just send us your e-mail, we'll be able to communicate in a better way. You won't be able to get that information from the government. No, siree. They've already consulted the world, they've consulted the experts, they've already consulted academia and they've already consulted the front lines. They've already done their job. We need to do ours. Unless we work together to present a common front against this particular bill, we're going to lose and we're going to lose it strong.

1650

We have a little bill now. It isn't much of a bill. It used to be much longer. All we have now is that the government is interested in offering equivalent learning programs by non-teachers who will not be required to do a security or criminal check.

And when the Liberals were in opposition, when the Tories introduced it, we thought it was a good idea. Why isn't it a good idea to make sure those programs that are taught will be taught by teachers who will go through a criminal check as a way of protecting our children? Why is that not good enough for this government anymore? It was good when the Tories were in power; why isn't it good today? Surely we are putting kids at risk. Young people are vulnerable. We are putting them at risk by putting them in these contracted-out programs. Surely if I believe it, many of the folks listening to the program will believe it too.

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): That's an exaggeration.

Mr. Marchese: If they are not teachers, they are not required to have a criminal check. Monsieur Colle, is that an exaggeration? It's not.

Hon. Mr. Colle: It is.

Mr. Marchese: It is not. Yeah, I want you to do your two minutes and tell me why it's exaggerated. I don't understand. Did I say something that's exaggerated, Shelley?

Hon. Mr. Colle: That's just exaggeration.

Mr. Marchese: What did I say? If I say it in whispering tones, it won't sound so exaggerated. Okay, here we go. Maybe if I do it with a lower tone.

These programs are not going to be taught by teachers, correct?

Hon. Mr. Colle: They're going to be taught through the school board.

Mr. Marchese: No, no, Mikey. That's the problem. They are not taught through the school boards. The minister will have to sign off for one year. After that, sayonara.

Hon. Mr. Colle: It's not a problem.

Mr. Marchese: No, no, Michael, I'm sorry. The Minister of Citizenship doesn't know, not because—he ought to know—

The Deputy Speaker: I just feel a little left out.

Mr. Marchese: Yeah, I know—exactly. Through you, to the minister, I read the bill. In the bill it says that after the first year, the minister doesn't have to sign off on those programs anymore. Correcto?

Hon. Mr. Colle: The programs will be provided through the school board.

Mr. Marchese: Right. The programs will be provided through the school board, by outside providers signed off by the principal. The programs are offered by—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: No, no, Michael.

Through you, Speaker, the principal doesn't provide the program; the principal just signs off.

Hon. Mr. Colle: The principal has total involvement—

Mr. Marchese: No. You see, the minister wants to believe what he wants to believe, and I understand that, because he has to try to defend the bill as best as he can. The principal is not going to be thoroughly involved, as he claims. The principal is so wiped, overwhelmed by the responsibilities that have been downloaded by the previous government, yet another task is given to him or her, and he or she is going to be overly involved in these thousands of programs that are going to be offered outside of the school system.

How, Michele, how?

Hon. Mr. Colle: They are very capable of doing it.

Mr. Marchese: Non, il n'est pas possible.

These programs are going to be offered by non-teachers, and because they are offered by non-teachers it is a parallel system outside of the public system. It's a private system, and they will not have to go through a criminal check. That's not exaggerated.

I want, through you, Speaker, the parliamentary assistant or mon ami monsieur Colle, the Minister of Citizenship, to stand up and tell me that I am wrong and that it is indeed a requirement that those non-teachers of those programs that are going to be farmed out will be criminally inspected or checked out—please.

Mrs. Mitchell: You're wrong, Rosario.

Mr. Marchese: I want to be wrong. The member for Huron-Bruce says I'm wrong. But she just makes this claim. She hasn't read the bill. I don't expect her to. Please, I don't expect her to. But neither she nor the Minister of Citizenship has read the bill. They have no way of knowing whether I am right or they are wrong. I claim they are wrong, because having read the bill, there's nothing in the bill, member from Huron, that says that these non-teachers will have a criminal check. Nada.

So I urge the Liberal members, if they are firm in their convictions, as they appear to be, without knowing, that they read the bill. Read the bill. Consult with the parliamentary assistant. Consult with the minister. See what they know, if they know. Then come back and do a 20-minute response, two-minute, whatever you like. Do something. Do some kind of a response so that the good citizens can hear the truth coming from both of you, or all of you or however many of you.

Interjection: You don't care about the kids.

Mr. Marchese: I hope you call us and tell us what you feel about this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa—Orléans): It is strange to hear a whole hour of negatives, negatives, negatives and putting kids at risk by giving them the opportunity to stay in school longer and to learn. We have 51,000 kids a year drop out without a diploma. That leads to the other problems of unemployment and low earnings, and they're 15 times more likely to be incarcerated if they haven't done some post-secondary. We have to look at those statistics and say, "What are we going to do for our kids?"

That is what this Liberal bill is doing; that's what our government is doing. Other provinces have much better records of keeping their kids in school, and we have to get up to those standards. That's why we set the target of 85% of students staying in school by 2010-11. That would be up from 71% today.

This is extremely important. We're not putting the kids at risk. They're at risk now when they leave school. What we're doing is giving them an opportunity.

One of the programs I have worked on with Algonquin College and a couple of high schools in my area—we haven't got a resolution. They're all wired together and Algonquin now can deliver programs in our high schools throughout the area. Somebody from high school not liking the academic stream but able to better fit into something on the technical side will be able to register at Algonquin if this goes forward, take their courses in their home school and write the exams at Algonquin. That would be really good. We'd be keeping kids in school. This is the right way to go in Ontario.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I'm pleased to offer a few comments in response to the member for Trinity—Spadina. I think that one of the assumptions this piece of legislation is built upon is the notion that by keeping people in school longer, somehow you're going to have some success with regard to people who don't want to be there. If we were to really look at that issue, those options, those attitudes are all formed a long time before the current leaving age of 16. So it is clear to the vast majority of students that they are better off being in school after 16.

The question of the statistics on how many students actually leave the school system is subject to a great deal of interpretation. There isn't even a really good record of students when they leave school. Sometimes they drift, sometimes they come back, sometimes they're able to acquire equivalency through the GED program. So I think that when we look at this particular piece of legislation—the government talks about providing non-teachers for particular programs and things like that. But really, the benefits of school should become obvious at a much earlier age, and that's where the effort should be made.

Ms. Martel: I appreciated the analysis of this bill that was done by my colleague from Trinity—Spadina. It just shows how out to lunch the government is on a critical issue facing kids.

The government should have been dealing with the serious question of why thousands and thousands of kids want to drop out of our school system. Why? And when we get to the bottom of that, what are the supports that we need in schools to engage them again and keep them there?

1700

I think that these kids need help with addictions, need help with mental health illness, need help dealing with sexual assault that might have happened at home, and there are no psychologists in the schools to help them deal with that, there are no social workers in the schools to help them deal with that, there are no mental health workers in the schools to help deal with that—nada.

Anyone from the government who thinks that we will just farm out that problem to equivalent learning groups, to agencies, to organizations in the community that have none of that expertise, none of that support, that are not trained to provide that support to these students—suddenly we're going to farm all these kids out to these agencies and they're going to be okay. What is wrong with you people? What are you thinking of?

The only way we're going to engage kids again is by dealing with the root problems of why they're leaving school in the first place. This government should be investing to have psychologists in the schools again, investing to have mental health workers in the schools again, investing to have addiction workers in the schools again, investing to have the trades and the industrial arts and those programs in the schools again. But until the government makes those investments in the public school system, we're not going to be helping these kids, and equivalent learning programs aren't going to be doing anything to change the root problems.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot): I have a tremendous amount of respect and admiration for the member from Trinity—Spadina. His years of experience and his concern for kids are palpable, and I appreciate many of the good suggestions he made in his hour.

However, I do need to point out to those who are watching what he didn't say. He referenced the OECTA newsletter, but he left out the part where OECTA says:

"Members of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association ... applaud the plan to match individual students' strengths, interests and career goals...."

"We agree that all secondary school students deserve an equal opportunity to graduate and that the government is prudent in taking steps to remove barriers that impede success for those at risk...."

"The strategy has a better chance of succeeding because the government is working with all stakeholders to make the legislation relevant to students and parents...."

There are other comments as well from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation which I could reference, but I think the other thing that I need to footnote here—because I was anxious, as one who sat on the committee and listened to the debate and participated

and had some concerns; and I can assure the member that there was no fraud in that which we dealt with—is that I waited and waited for the honourable member, on behalf of his party, to make a single amendment to Bill 52. Do you know, members of the Legislative Assembly, that the party opposite made not one single amendment? Notwithstanding all of the concerns that he's articulated, not one single amendment was made by the third party with respect to this legislation. And that's a shame, because I think the minister from Trinity–Spadina has a lot of good ideas that—

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The former minister.

Mr. McMeekin: The former minister.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The member for Trinity–Spadina has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Marchese: I do respect the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot and I do believe in his sincerity; that's not an issue. I'm questioning the minister and the government and this bill. The reason why I did not make any amendments is because—

Hon. Mr. Caplan: You've got no ideas.

Mr. Marchese: The only thing you've got there, David, is that you're going to be providing alternative programming, and you can't amend that. It's a bad idea. You can't fix that. You can't say, "Well, this is how we make that better." The whole thing has got to be scrapped. We opposed it from the beginning. We say it's wrong. You're farming it out because you don't want teachers to be teaching these programs. You're farming it out so that you—it's all about saving money. You're not helping the kids. As the member from Nickel Belt said—it is so very painfully obvious—unless you deal with the fundamental problems that kids bring into the school system—Johnny, listen. Unless you deal with the problems, you can't solve the educational problems you're trying to put forth.

The member from Ottawa–Orléans says we're putting kids at risk by not providing Bill 52. That's not the way to do it. You're not helping those kids. The way to help the kids at risk—these are the kids who bring social problems, poverty problems. They bring psychological problems, learning, educational problems, mental health issues. They've got substance abuse issues, sexual abuse issues. You've got to deal with that. If you don't deal with that, all this about, "We want to help the kids because we really care," is all blah, blah. You don't really mean it. Deal with that, and if you do, then you're going to get to solve the problem. And then if you bring the youth workers, it will help. Youth workers know how to work with them. If you bring better technological programs into the system, you are helping the system. Improve what you've got. Don't create a bad parallel system that's private. That's not going to do the trick.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I am pleased to have an opportunity to address this House on Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning.

I wanted to start out by saying that this is another promise that the government made over three years ago and that the government is keeping. Oftentimes, people like to say around here that promises have not been kept. Well, in the education area alone, I can count over 20 promises that we made, 20 commitments we made when we ran for office, that we've kept. We've made education a top priority during our tenure and have spent \$8.3 billion in five years in investment in Ontario's publicly funded schools.

Class sizes: We have shrunk the sizes of the classes and put in an additional \$126 million for smaller class sizes.

Peace and stability: Schools began the year in an era of peace and stability. All sorts of negotiations have taken place with the teachers, and we have, for the first time ever, contracts that run from September 2004 to August 2008.

Specialist teachers: We've funded approximately 600 additional specialist teachers. That's been put in place recently, and that's in addition to the almost 2,400 teachers funded to reduce class sizes in the primary grades.

Summer training: More than 10,000 elementary teachers took summer training and began the school year with expanded specialized training in reading, writing and math.

Student success: We've continued to invest in student success programs to improve the graduation rate and create new opportunities for all students, with some 1,900 new high school teachers over three years; 1,300 new teachers were in place in the school year; at least 800 teachers dedicated to the student success program.

We've continued to revise applied grades. The revised applied grades 9 and 10 mathematics curriculum, released in September 2005, is providing advanced opportunities for students in obtaining the number of credits needed for graduation.

Learning to 18, which is in front of us today, is a promise that we made. In December 2005, we introduced learning-to-18 legislation that, if passed, will make it mandatory for students to stay in a learning environment up to graduation or to the age of 18. The legislation that is in front of us here today is complemented by programs that provide students with more support and allow them to customize their education. Students will be able to enrol in specialist high-skill majors, earn dual credits through apprenticeship training and post-secondary courses, and take advantage of expanded co-operative education choices.

We have repair projects. Ontario public schools receive funding for badly needed repair projects, including fixing leaky roofs, replacing old boilers and installing new windows. More than 2,100 projects that started last summer have been completed or are underway, representing an investment of more than \$500 million.

Libraries: All Ontario students in publicly funded schools are benefiting from new textbooks and first-time dedicated funding for school libraries. This government

has provided a total of \$44 million for textbooks and other learning resources to support students in the 2005-06 school year.

1710

Per pupil funding: Recognizing their needs, the McGuinty government has increased per pupil funding by \$627 for Ontario's French-language schools. Since coming to office, the government has increased funding to the French-language system by almost \$140 million.

Safe schools: another promise kept. The government appointed a special safe schools action team to implement new measures to protect students. These measures include province-wide school safety audits, funding for new security devices, bullying prevention programs in all schools, bullying prevention training for principals and reviewing the Safe Schools Act.

We've also taken further steps on bullying. As part of a comprehensive bullying prevention strategy, the government has invested \$23 million over three years to reduce the incidence and fundamentally change attitudes about bullying. This includes an ongoing \$1-million partnership with Kids Help Phone, a new provincial registry of effective bullying prevention programs and the new mandatory bullying prevention program in every school in Ontario.

Healthier schools: another promise kept. To assist in the development of healthier lifestyle habits in our young people, the government has directed school boards and principals to provide elementary students from grades 1 to 8 with at least 20 minutes of sustained moderate to vigorous daily physical health activity each day during instruction time.

Sabrina's Law: We've enacted Sabrina's Law requiring every school board to establish and maintain an anaphylactic policy. This was done basically through my good friend Brantford MPP Dave Levac, requiring every school board to have training for school staff to deal with life-threatening allergies on a regular basis and have emergency procedures in place for anaphylactic pupils—also another promise kept as part of this package.

Community use of schools: The government is providing \$20 million to school boards to help them open up schools to non-profit community groups to use after hours and year round all across Ontario. All of us in all of our ridings have probably heard from various groups that want to use schools. We're trying to reverse what had occurred earlier prior to our being in power when school use was expensive and required payment by those who wanted to use it.

Another promise kept was literacy. Teams of experts continue to work directly with struggling schools and school boards to improve student achievement in literacy where achievement has consistently been lower than the provincial average. In 2005, more than 100 schools were provided with additional supports through the turnaround teams program. The turnaround teams are helping to raise student literacy achievement in Ontario schools.

Another promise kept: parent involvement. A new provincial parent involvement policy has been developed,

making it easier for parents to participate in their children's education.

Another promise kept: graduation rates. In 2003-04, 32% of high school students were not graduating and only 54% of elementary students were meeting the standards in reading, writing and math, but progress has been made. In 2004-05, 62% of elementary students are meeting the standards and 71% of high school students are graduating. These rates continue to rise.

Professional development: In October of last year, the government announced its intention to introduce a second step in teachers' professional development by requiring that every new teacher receive the new teacher induction program in the first year of teaching. The \$15-million program will be available to Ontario's approximately 10,000 new teachers each year. The program is based on the recommendations of the teacher development working table, which is a subcommittee of the education partnership table.

Finally, another promise kept: rural student success. The government has introduced a rural student success program that will improve the viability of the rural high schools, increase graduation rates and encourage more rural students to pursue post-secondary education. The new rural student success program includes a \$10-million lighthouse program and a new rural experience emphasis in the curriculum and \$3.5-million e-learning pilot project to increase the diversity of courses available at rural schools by providing a provincial platform to enable students to take the same course from a variety of different locations.

So you can see that there are several promises, several commitments that we made on the education front which we are fulfilling and which we will continue to fulfill in the rest of our term, in our mandate, here at Queen's Park.

Speaking specifically and directly to Bill 52, this bill here simply says that instead of dropping out at the age of 16, a student has to stay in school or get equivalent learning until age 18. I see absolutely nothing wrong with this process.

Kids will always drop out. You can go back 20 years, 40 years, 100 years, 500 years, and young people will decide, for one reason or another, that they don't want to go to school anymore. Later on in life, they may learn to regret that.

What the government is saying here today is that we want teenagers to stay in school until age 18, to spend those additional two years either in getting specialized training, if they're going to go into some technical program, or to continue their education and get the required courses, the required training that they need. I see nothing wrong with this.

I think of my previous profession, one that I still have, as a lawyer. When people used to come to me, when I had a law practice—

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Are you practising right now?

Mr. Berardinetti: No, I'm not practising right now.

When I was practising, though, people would come to me and would have to sign a document and some of them couldn't sign their signature, so they had to use an X. It was sad to see that they did not have the ability to sign their signature because they did not know how to write the letters of the alphabet. These were people who were only in their 60s or 70s, and sometimes even in their 50s, who had come to Canada from foreign countries and wanted to sign a legal document but couldn't do so.

Here in this country we not only have the opportunity to go to school, but also the government directing and providing not just regular educational programs, but also equivalent learning. So if someone wants to specialize in tool and dye making or in some other kind of technical area or semi-professional area, they stay in that program and do the kind of work and the kind of learning they need to do; I see nothing wrong with this. It fits in perfectly with the other programs that I've listed earlier in making our education system the best it can possibly be.

In closing, I want to say this: In making our education system in Ontario the best that it can possibly be, it complements our health system, which is also the best it can possibly be. When you have a good education system and a good health system, I honestly think it attracts the best employment, the best employers and the best possible environment for a good economy.

We've seen Toyota wanting to locate here in Ontario, instead of going to the United States or to other provinces. We've seen other large companies deciding to open up their plants or their operations or their offices here in Ontario. That's because we have a high level of educated people and a high level of healthy people, with a health system in place that will keep them healthy and that will allow for a productive and strong workforce.

So this particular bill fits into the larger plan, which I fully support. I think the government is doing the right thing in having a strong education system and a strong health system and ultimately a strong province for all the people in Ontario.

I'm happy to support Bill 52 here today.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. O'Toole: I listened to the member from Scarborough Southwest, and he did list a litany of what they consider to be improvements in education.

Fundamentally, one of the articles in the paper today outlined some of the problems with education, and not just in the auditor's report on the general neglect of children.

In all respects, I would say that all three parties, including the member from Trinity-Spadina, who spoke earlier, are passionate about education, and they see the value of it with respect to an individual achieving their full potential in life.

In fact, if you look at the title of Bill 52, you'll see that it's "Learning to Age 18." It really makes a very good sort of sound bite, if you will. But if you look at the content of the bill—and again, I realize that it's a total of 18 pages and it was first introduced almost a year ago; in fact, December 13, 2005. It's struggling. In the public

hearings many of the commenters, the stakeholders in education, were not complimentary. I shall make some of those references in my remarks when I'm speaking in just a few moments.

1720

I think the member for Scarborough Southwest, like the rest of us, was passionate about trying to find a solution. No doubt the peace and harmony they've put in the public school system is a positive thing, and I'd be the first to agree with that. But now they're bringing in a bill that has some punitive responses instead of real solutions.

Learning to 18 means—if you look at the preamble of the bill, you'll see that it says, "Understand the education system needs to instil in young people a lasting, positive attitude toward learning that will keep them motivated...."

Some of the actions in this bill do anything but as a positive reinforcement for the value and importance of staying in school and learning, and lifelong learning, which is really the theme today.

So it's in that regard that we have serious problems with this bill; many of the stakeholders as well. I'll be addressing some of the more substantive issues in a couple of minutes.

Ms. Martel: In response to the comments that were made by the member, it would be good if some of the members went back and took a look at who actually made presentations and what they meant to say, because many, many of the groups that came before the committee during the course of public hearings expressed serious concerns about this bill. My colleague from Trinity-Spadina already read into the record the concerns that were raised directly with the minister from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, on November 21. I won't go through those concerns again, but I will just say that they are very legitimate, and I suspect they would be feelings that would be similarly expressed by board after board after board right across this province.

What the government fails to realize and fails to deal with in this bill is that kids don't drop out of school for no reason whatsoever, for fun, on a whim. I don't believe that. They drop out because there are very serious, compelling issues in their lives that need to be dealt with. Those can be issues of poverty, issues of assault at home, issues with respect to addictions, whether to drugs or alcohol, issues with respect to mental health illness. I think these are the things that drive kids to get the sense that the school and others aren't meeting their needs, and so they drop out.

I think it makes much more sense for us to have those kids in a safe learning environment, which is the schools, and actually provide them with the supports they need to deal with the root causes of why they are not engaged in the classroom. The government would have been much better making an investment in those supports, in mental health workers, in addiction counsellors, in psychologists etc. to get at the root problems, to deal with those issues, to keep those kids in school in a safe learning environment.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): I rise with pleasure to give some input to Bill 52, the learning to 18 program.

I chose to speak on this because this bill definitely will make a difference to the young people in my riding. We've had several pilot projects in my riding this year for young people who have dropped out of school and, believe it or not, the success of getting people back in school through those pilot programs has been great. As a result of that, I thought I'd share some of my thoughts on this particular bill.

I'm a walking example of a young man who wanted to drop out of school. As I was growing up, my first cousin was an electrician and I used to follow him around when he was doing houses in the village that I lived in, and I was really interested in becoming an electrician. At age 14, I applied to the local oil company to be an apprentice and I passed the examination, but my brother was a principal of a school at the time and he talked me out of it and kept me in high school till I finished.

Lo and behold, when I finished high school the first thing I did was enter vocational school and I went into the electrical field to become an electrician. Believe it or not, the program that I was in is no different than what the Minister of Education is proposing here, which is a joint program with industry, which is the electrical unions etc., where you go to their school but you also belong to the school system to get your secondary school diploma. That's the exact program I got into. I graduated out of it, came to Canada and here I am today, after I studied in Canada and worked for Bell Canada for many years. I would say I'm a living example of it. I believe that what the minister is doing is right because it worked for me, and I believe it will work for many in my riding. I'm looking forward to voting for this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Didn't the member for Durham rise before? No?

The member for Erie–Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak: I was looking forward to the member for Durham's second round of comments to see if he would contradict his first round of comments or reinforce them, or enter debate with the member from Durham.

I'm pleased to rise, and I always enjoy the comments of my colleague from Scarborough Southwest, who was speaking just a few moments ago, and before that, of Mr. Marchese, the education critic for the third party.

I had the chance, if you recall, to address Bill 52 in my third reading debate comments last week. I still feel that I have the same reservations about the government's approach on education. I did note that a lot of my constituents had grave concerns about the driver's licence provision, which now, I think after a public outcry and opposition by the Progressive Conservatives and New Democrats, has been watered down. But there are a lot of questions outstanding with respect to how some of the programs operating outside the purview of the principal or the school board will be organized.

There are other adjoining issues, as I mentioned. The agreement that was forced upon school boards by then-Education Minister Kennedy has compelled a significant reduction in supervisory time. This means that the teachers are not as available as they had been before for lunchtime supervision, playground supervision, after-school supervision or on-call duties. This has meant that educational assistants who should be with special-needs children have been taken away from those duties. It imposes a new cost, as well, on the school boards, and responsibilities on the principals when they cannot find enough resources to cover those times. So I do hope that the government will listen to the advice they have heard in that respect and respond accordingly to ensure that students have the full availability of services at the schools.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Scarborough Southwest, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Berardinetti: I appreciate the comments from the various members on what I had to say earlier. I want to briefly address again the concerns that people have about the punitive sections, I guess, that we're trying to put in place.

From what I can read in the bill, there is liability on a parent or guardian who tries to prevent or doesn't allow a person 16 years or older to go to school. The fine is not that great; it's \$200. There's also an exception to that, which is that the court may, instead of imposing the fine, require a personal bond to be placed so that the person can go to school.

The other punitive sections that I looked through speak of those who still don't want to go to school. But again, we're not putting people in jail. We're not saying, "You're 17, and you don't want to go to school. We're going to put you in jail." What we're basically saying is, "We want you to go to school and we, the government, think it's in your best interest to do so." There are a number of exceptions in this section, as well, which exempt people who cannot, or for certain reasons are unable to, go to school between the ages of 16 and 18. They are allowed to be exempt from that.

So it's a fair and balanced approach. You're never going to have a perfect system, but I think this bill just reinforces the point that education is important, and in this province we have made it a high priority. I stand here today fully supportive of Bill 52.

1730

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. O'Toole: It's a pleasure to speak on Bill 52. I want to start by saying that I was looking forward to our critic the member from Oak Ridges, who today is actually involved with Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, so he's unable to make his important leadoff speech. But I am looking forward to it, and in that regard I'll keep my remarks to a limit of 20 minutes.

There are really three themes, perhaps four, that I'd like to cover in my remarks. The first has been covered by some of the previous speakers—I think there's consistent agreement on this; the member from Trinity–Spadina and others have spoken on it. The first issue, of

course, is the quality issue and the accountability issue, if you want to consider that one or two items. That is important. It's a very important part of it: the ability to achieve up to eight credits—equivalency credits, as they call them. I will refer to that section of Bill 52 in the fullness of time.

The other part of the bill is the punitive action part, the enforcement and reprisals if non-compliance is determined. At the end of the day, I'm quite disappointed that the real role of the parent in all of this, and indeed the role of the student—we've got to recognize the importance of young people today; 16 to 18 is certainly at a very important decision-making time in their life and there needs to be some mentoring and respect for that. But if you look at the bill—and I apply it to my own experience—I have to say that most of us try to validate that we have well-informed or at least strongly held views on the importance of public education, and that should be clearly on the record.

That being said, some of the comments I have from my constituents in the riding of Durham—I digress for a moment. Just yesterday, I was very happy, because there's a page from the riding of Durham, Mackenzie Gunn, and her parents and grandparents and family friends were there, and they all appealed to me and said without any provocation that they were so impressed with the pages and the learning program and the stimulation it gave them—there are alternative ways for people today to learn. Perhaps how someone like me learned, sitting in rows and all that—education has to be innovative today to meet the needs of young people. The competition is basically reality television, if you want to put it that way. But I put to you that they are educated, being the parent of five children myself.

It's innovation in education that I would probably, more importantly, like to see the minister spend some time on, trying to engage those people, as she says in the preamble of the speech: "Understand the education system needs to instil in young people a lasting, positive attitude toward learning that will keep them motivated to stay in school until they graduate or turn 18," and, I would say to you, well beyond that. We live in what I'd call an age of learning and an age where it's a knowledge-based economy. Most of the commenters today—indeed, our finance critic, Tim Hudak, often uses that response to the innovation economy. Our young people are that economy. No one should be denied the opportunity.

As I look at all of our children, I must say for the record that I spent a couple of years as a school trustee and as chair of certain committees and all of that, and have a great appreciation for the public education system. My wife, who taught for over 20 years—let's leave it at that—just retired from teaching this past summer and was and still is a lifelong teacher, in the fact that we had five children, one of whom is a high school teacher, did her teacher training and went to Lakehead University for her graduate degree and now is a vice-principal in a high school in London, England. She went there initially just to gain international experience in education and to

further her education, but she is there today. I'd just say that all five children's success in life is attributed to the partnership in learning. It's in that vein that there is a role not just for professional educators, but for the families themselves, and indeed for the community.

I see some changes in education that are important. I'd say that the co-op experience, much like the co-op experience here with the pages, which I mentioned earlier, is real-world experience: them critically watching adults in the world of work or performance in the public sense. In my view, that experience and this innovation are completely missing under my current understanding of Bill 52. If you look at some of the sections—I do want to stay pretty well focused on the themes I mentioned: quality, accountability and the punitive kind of actions that are implied in this bill. I would say this of the bill, as I said of the preamble, which takes about two pages of the bill: It's quite lovely language actually, if that's the appropriate word. But then you look at the rest of the bill. This thing here went out for hearings and was brought back to the House in June 2006, and it's still languishing on the order paper. Why is that? If you were to listen to some of the input that was heard during the committee, MPPs heard from representatives of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation and the Ontario College of Teachers. The concern is that if Bill 52 is passed in its current form, it would water down the standards. There it is, by the stakeholders, the professional educators.

It goes on to say that this government is failing to consider many points, but it is the penalties for not staying in school that are of particular concern to families and indeed educators across the province. As I mentioned before, my colleague the member from Oak Ridges, Frank Klees, has said that Bill 52 is hare-brained. That may be stating it in a media-friendly word. In fact, the enforcement divisions here are a whole new regime of education bureaucrats, if you will. But I would say that education must be a lifelong process; it doesn't stop arbitrarily at any age, certainly not at 16 and certainly not at 18 as well. There must be doorways or pathways for young people that aren't perhaps traditional. I can think of a number of different experiences of young people today choosing—they're perhaps bored of the education system. They're very bright young people who just aren't turned on and perhaps turn to other kinds of acting out. Maybe it would be better if they weren't in that particular setting, but they should be in a stimulating learning environment. That may be something they should be consulted on: "What would you like to do?" It may seem a bit progressive, but I believe that is the choice.

If I look at the work that our leader, John Tory, has done even more recently with youth at risk—there was a report earlier on that. More recently, the report that he's just issued deals with trying to bring people into the fullness of our economy. What's the most simple theme to that? The whole educational challenge, the skills training learning that's needed and indeed deficient in this province. He makes some recommendations, working

with TV Ontario and other providers, to make sure there are opportunities outside of the classroom for young people to continue to learn.

The report I'm referring to is *A Time for Action*. As I said before, that report by our leader, John Tory, is his reflections as a former business executive and a very widely respected community participant. He's reaching out. This report has 14 recommendations, many of which focus directly on some of the suggestions that the Minister of Education simply isn't listening to effectively.

The very first recommendation from *A Time for Action* is, "A new online assessment, education and testing initiative to help potential newcomers address the accreditation process...." That very assessment tool should be available to young people to determine what would inspire them to learn further, whether it's the creative arts part, whether it's the technology part—or it's the barriers to the educational system or the predictability in the education system—perhaps education at other times of the day. Some high schools are starting to offer night credits for full-time students. This is the innovation. He goes on to say that some of the barriers—this is Mr. Tory's report and it's our report; I give it out to people who are wondering what are some of the innovative ideas that we have.

Number 6 is "More financial support." Students see the barrier to post-secondary or to credited learning right in the system of OSAP itself. I say that because they had the Bob Rae report, the failed Liberal leader campaign guy. It was widely supported here. It was a great report, I would say to him. They promised—you'd recall this—a hard cap on tuition fees. What did they do? They had the Rae report and they raised them, up to 30%. These are barriers. Children, when they're 16 and 17 and looking ahead, don't see their parents with the resources to do it. Mentally they develop barriers and it's those barriers that we should be working on.

1740

The member from Trinity-Spadina, in his remarks, spent a fair amount of time talking about the social infrastructure for children at risk. I couldn't agree more. He speaks passionately about that, and quite knowledgeably as well about that particular topic. There's a failure here, through the hearings, over the last year of these hearings, and the stakeholders are all saying that this bill simply doesn't get it.

If I look at my own riding and what I've been hearing there—and last week, our finance critic from Erie-Lincoln went on to talk about parent participation in this debate. In my own riding, I've had a number of e-mails, a broad number of e-mails, and I'm going to relate those to the viewers tonight because I think it's an important third-party parent perspective, non-partisan. I quite frankly will say here openly that I don't know Linda and Larry Wescott any more than that they e-mailed me. They're a home-schooled family, and this is their observation. I quote this for Hansard:

"Many home-schoolers complete their formal training before age 18. (Although they do not have a diploma that would be recognizable by the ministry.) Without being

able to provide proof of attendance at a school, they will be unable to attain a driver's licence."

That has been slightly modified in the amendments that I referred to earlier, but that threat is still there to force them to comply. These are involved parents, home-schooling parents, fully engaged with the development options and potential for their children. Mr. and Mrs. Wescott also went on to say:

"We feel that laws passed in our province should protect the rights of all citizens of this province. We feel that any changes to current legislation should focus on providing support of choice to individuals as they work through their choice of secondary education and [move] on to post-secondary and post-educational destinations." Again, the point is about choice. That should be, in a free and democratic society, their right. I'm not speaking to that in any partisan way; I'm saying that has been outlawed.

If you don't think that's a pertinent comment, Mr. Speaker, in today's *National Post* there's quite a good article. It's in the *National Post*, page A16. The title is "Union Alliances Plague School Board, Trustee Says." This is directly from the article. It says, "A Toronto District School Board trustee says unions helped cause October's budget crisis and will continue to interfere with boardroom politics through their aggressive campaigns against" any "spending cuts...."

"Campaigning on a promise to reject union endorsement, Mr. Goodman," who was one of the trustee candidates, "was on the receiving end of CUPE attack ads. He says he was offered union support in return for signing a pledge not to cut staff or close schools," and he refused, but he went on to win.

This is the point: the politicization of the classroom, which has many, many parents and indeed students frustrated. If you think of extracurricular activities, sports activities, being terminated because of some work-related issue, it's completely unfair to the future, the potential and the enthusiasm of those young people. That's an article worth looking at for balance.

I would say that another parent spoke to me, or actually e-mailed me: Nancy Blakely, who is from the neighbouring riding in Northumberland. She sent an e-mail that reads as follows:

"For whatever reason, it may be necessary for a grade 12 student to take a semester off.... If a student is unable to complete a semester, they should be able to work for those four or five months and at least be productive members of our society, earning money and supporting themselves while they prepare for the next semester."

Ms. Blakely also writes, "The Liberals argue that they will make exception for extraordinary circumstances. But this will take months to process, and by the time an exception is made, the youth will have lost their job. And, as the youth is almost 18 at the time that this happens, they will likely turn 18" before the government even gets the paperwork done.

It is true that they're building a whole enforcement bureaucracy tracking students' progress and behaviour.

It's completely inappropriate. The resources should be with the student. That's what has been called for.

Another constituent, Carla MacDonald Everill, made this statement in an e-mail to the previous Minister of Education that she shared with me: "At what point did you decide that you had the right to discipline my children and to decide what path they wish to walk in their lives?" She also made this request, which I am pleased to relay to the government with my full support, I should say, and I quote her: "I hope that you will stop this bill and allow the families of this province to raise their own children without constant, unwarranted interference from an excessively intrusive government."

There you have it. These are unsolicited and freely submitted comments from my constituents in the riding of Durham. That is together with some of the other comments made by the member from Erie-Lincoln and the member from Oak Ridges and other speakers who are concerned that this bill fails to address quality and accountability, as well as student input.

The choices that I've referred to are sort of off base—they're just not with it—as if Dalton knows best. That's the kind of attitude that I've found. Perhaps "arrogant" or "self-absorbed" would be another way of expressing it, that they think that he's the education minister. Well, you'd ask yourself, how is it working? They've put a lot of money into it. I agree with that. How much has actually found its way into innovative solutions? If I look for innovative solutions, there have been none.

The member from Scarborough Southwest went on to say things that I'm sure he'll live to regret. The missing piece here is the real choice thing, and looking at barriers to destinations.

I'm also going to refer to another third party, the *Globe and Mail* article today talking about innovative solutions: "Six Years in Manitoba Buys a Free Education." Imagine telling a 16- or 17-year-old student, "Under this plan, a graduate of a four-year science program who paid \$13,258 in tuition would get \$7,955 back over a period of years. That same student would also have received \$3,498 in tuition tax credits and \$3,379 in education tax credits during the four years of study, for a total of \$14,832 in possible earned-income credits."

There is no barrier. The student aged 16 or 17 making pathway choices now doesn't see a financial barrier to their post-secondary career learning or trade learning, to go on and find and pick and choose choices.

I'm all for the parents and the students being consulted but, more importantly, being mentored if there is weakness in the family setting for whatever reason. As the member from Trinity-Spadina said, mentorship of some sort is important: making sure that they don't get lost in the shuffle without the resources and confidence that they can do it.

I cannot speak for anyone but myself, but I am convinced—we're waiting for the comments from our education critic, the member from Oak Ridges, Frank Klees, who is passionate about education—

Interjection: Passionate?

Mr. O'Toole: Passionate, and committed, I might say, in the broadest sense.

When you think of education, the most important thing you should think of is not the fancy, glib speeches. "Learning to 18" is a nice sort of sound bite. What are the solutions, what are the results and what are the initiatives that this government has taken? There are threats and intimidation and reduction of standards. That's what the bill actually says. It's what the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation and the Ontario College of Teachers have said. There really isn't much room to move in this bill. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for us to support it.

That being said, we would agree that education is the only vertical mobility opportunity for young people. We shouldn't be creating disincentives and barriers. We should be creating hope and opportunity, and that's something that's missing from the bill. There is no plan here, as in most things. They would say almost anything—we've seen that in the last two days in response to the auditor's report. They've neglected the children in the care of children's aid services. In fact, there are things here, in public education, where spending is somewhat not accountable. Saying one thing and doing another is not something that children should be modelling after, especially when you have a Premier who said so many things prior to the election and failed to keep those commitments. What lesson is that teaching our children?

I know that our leader, John Tory, is a person who is committed to doing what he says, and we as a caucus will support that. I've made reference to his many reports but, more importantly, the most recent reports on gateways and pathways for people. That's why I think a better alternative would be to look at our party in the next government.

1750

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Marchese: Speaker, I have to tell you, through you to everyone, that there is something in this Bill 52 that has a flavour of a Conservative kind of proclivity. I was so surprised when the Liberals introduced this bill that I thought, "Isn't this interesting?" Then, to find, of all surprises, that the Tories and New Democrats were on the same side—I couldn't believe it. I thought, "How could the Conservative Party not support a bill that, under normal circumstances, they would be the authors of such a thing?" Imagine my surprise. John, you understand what I'm saying? Here's something that the Tories would have done had they been in power. They're out of power because they're in opposition now. So the Liberals introduce a dumb bill—to be fair to you, I don't know how else to say it—and the Tories are opposing it.

Here's the other question: Do the Tories oppose the equivalent learning opportunity, which offers a parallel private educational program system? I would think that the Tories would like that. That's the only thing left in the bill. It appears to me that the Tories are opposing that, which is fascinating. I love to see the Tories in opposition—I do—because when they're in opposition, you

just don't know where they stand, right? It's humorous; it's certainly interesting. So if you're opposing this bill still, even though the only thing this government has put into this bill is the equivalent learning program, God bless. The Tories and New Democrats are on the same page.

I'm interested to hear from the member from Durham, waiting with anxiety almost to hear what the critic for education for the Conservative Party is going to say whenever he's going to speak for the full hour. So I'm looking forward to that.

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): I'm happy to rise and remark on the comments made by the member from Durham and to thank him a little bit for what was, I guess, much closer to an objective commentary on Bill 52 than has been provided by other members of the Legislature, especially the member from Trinity–Spadina. His one-hour speech is in stark contrast to that which we've heard from other members of the Legislature. There seems to be a bit of a pattern developing from that member, which is rather unfortunate.

Today, at the beginning of question period, the leader of the official opposition in his questioning took leave to shine a light on the wonderful work we've done in providing new powers to the Auditor General. In his questions to the Premier, in his second or third supplementary, he found the time to stop and say, "We're thankful and we're very happy with what you've done. We think it has been a great idea." I see the same pattern existing in the comments from the member from Durham.

I recall, in my first year or two here, that the member from Trinity–Spadina was a little more objective than he seems to be in the last little while. He seems to be sliding into a bit of a pattern in the last little while that was not there at the beginning of the term. I don't know what's going on. Perhaps there's an election closing in. He seems to be reaching out and pandering to certain groups that he thinks—

Mr. Marchese: Pandering?

Mr. Mauro: Pandering. Yes, it was an unfortunate hour. I would have expected it would have been more well spent.

Like most other members of this Legislature, I have met with all of the relevant stakeholders involved in this particular legislation—the teachers, the teachers' unions, the principals, the EAs. We've met with all of them, and I can tell you, the consistent message that's coming back from all of those relevant stakeholder groups is that they cannot be more thrilled with any government in the last recent history of the province in terms of what we have done for education in Ontario. They're thrilled to have us. Nothing's perfect.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I want to congratulate my colleague the member for Durham. He made a very fine speech and indicated his keen concern for young people in the province of Ontario and his desire that any changes that are made would be in the best interests of those young people. Throughout the time that I've known my colleague, he has always had a

keen interest in young people and has always supported whatever might be in their best interests. In this case, of course, we're speaking to somehow keeping young people in school, so to say, until age 18. This was an issue, by the way, that our government did start to address in the last years that we were in office, in 2002 and 2003. We were very, very concerned about the students who do drop out, the students that we called students at risk. Our plan was not like this particular plan, but our plan was to make sure that we started to identify these children as early as we could in life, those students who might at some point later on drop out. We had set up a committee that included the stakeholders, teachers, principals. In fact, one of the leaders of our committee was an outstanding principal from the Kingston community. But obviously we all need to make a commitment to make sure that our students remain in school, that they have the skills, they have the training and they have the education that will allow them to succeed in life. So it is important, and, as I say, obviously our critic will express the concerns about this legislation.

Ms. Martel: The member for Durham talked about folks who came to the committee who had concerns about the bill. I just want to read into the record two of the briefing notes from OECTA, October 2006: "Certified teachers must assess student learning for credit purposes exclusively."

November 16, 2006, another bulletin from OECTA: "OECTA believes that all secondary school credits must be assessed by certified teachers."

Mr. Marchese, do you think that Mr. Mauro told those teachers who came to meet with him that it's very clear that in the bill there is no guarantee that certified teachers are going to be assessing these programs? I bet you he didn't. So, for the record, here's what happened in committee.

November 2, my colleague Mr. Marchese said to legal counsel, Madam Goldberg, "Can I ask you, is this the section where we would know whether the programs offered would be by certified teachers, or is there another section that will deal with it later?" Madam Goldberg said, "I believe that it would be in the policies, standards and guidelines that will be issued under this section." So Mr. Marchese said again, "Wait a minute. I want to know. Is it going to be certified teachers or not?" and she said again, "If that's done"—that meaning, if certified teachers are going to be asked and are going to be able to deal with these problems—"it will be through those policies. I can't tell you right now what those policies"—blah, blah, blah—"are going to be."

So what is clear is, there is nothing in the bill that guarantees that secondary school credits will be assessed by certified teachers. I wonder how many of the Liberals who have been meeting with teachers from OECTA and OSSTF have been telling them that particular detail.

The Deputy Speaker: For the record, the member for Nickel Belt would know that questions and comments are intended to be directed to the speech given by the person who had the floor, and not become part of the debate.

You have now two minutes to respond, the member for Durham.

Mr. O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for defending me. I appreciate that.

I'm just going to thank individual speakers.

The member from Trinity-Spadina called this a dumb bill. He has the right to say what he thinks, and I think that reflects on some of the comments I made.

The member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan: I want to thank you. It's a compliment, because I did try to not interfere with the potential and the opportunity for our young people. That's the whole point of this debate tonight.

The member from Kitchener-Waterloo, who has just left, is a former Minister of Education. In fact, as a school trustee and chair of the Waterloo board of education, she was proclaimed "educator of the year" by teachers, educators, administrators and, I believe, students.

The member from Nickel Belt spoke to the comments from OECTA and others that were not supportive of the bill in the committee hearings that were held.

Do you want to know how important this is? I just attended the Durham Prosperity Initiative—this is from Durham region—and the booklet that was produced calls

it a prosperity conference. It was actually organized and facilitated by a number of students from the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, a wonderful group of innovative young people looking for real solutions to real problems of the economy: Munish Chopra, Christian Cox, Stephanie Heathcote, Brian Renaud, Matt Simpson and Michele Lee Wanhoy.

I would say one of the more important observations was with respect to this bill. It's related. It says "Major items discussed." Under "Training," it says "need for societal change in attitude"—I'm summarizing here—"forge stronger partnerships with the business community, skilled trades, universities and colleges; create more incentives for students to finish high school; educate students; reduce barriers for students and new Canadians; educate the public about the shortage of skilled trades; and emphasize opportunity to become available to participate in the economy."

There's more to be done and this bill doesn't go far enough. I don't think—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 10 o'clock, Thursday, December 7.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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Thursday 7 December 2006

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Jeudi 7 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 7 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 7 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

RAW MILK

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should immediately form an all-party task force to examine the issues surrounding raw milk and that the all-party task force report its findings to the House before the end of the spring session.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Murdoch has moved private member's notice of motion number 32. Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Murdoch, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Murdoch: This resolution does not choose sides. It does not say, "Drink raw milk." It does not say, "Don't drink raw milk." This resolution has only one aim: to debate. Debate is the foundation of our democratic system. We were elected to this House to discuss important issues. So today I put before you an opportunity to discuss a subject that has stirred up a lot of questions in our constituencies, in the media, on the street and even at home, but that has not yet been debated among us here in the legislative chamber.

The reason we need to look at this issue of raw milk is because (a) there is a thriving underground market in every constituency of Ontario; people—families, children—are consuming this product; (b) the issue of public health is in question, and it is our duty to examine that concern; and (c) none of us here is an expert on food choices, including myself. In fact, I don't even drink milk. Maybe the odd chocolate milk, but that's about it for me. So we should allow an all-party task force to examine the issues related to raw milk.

In Ontario, non-pasteurized milk is illegal for sale; the law is clear. But it is a 70-year-old rule made during the industrialization of farming in Ontario when undeniably some of the milk supply was dirty and deadly. To quote an editorial from the Owen Sound Sun Times—and the Sun Times, which I don't always agree with, have agreed that this is a good resolution and should be debated in the House—"The 'science' of producing hygienic raw milk has progressed greatly since the days when our grandmothers milked cows by hand into an old tin bucket and

asked us if we wanted a taste." Today's farms are equipped with modern, stainless steel tanks, refrigerated trucks and inspection methods. Today's farming has been made safer with access to these new tools.

But with that safety comes automation and over-processing, and I think you'll agree that more people are, for that reason, turning to organic or all-natural food. Non-pasteurized milk is one of the new consumer choices.

According to a government document, a quarter of a million Canadians drink non-pasteurized milk. I don't have the statistics on how many consumers eat raw fish, buy organic vegetables, organic bread, organic cheese or juices, prefer their steak raw, or even wear hemp clothing, but I imagine the number could be on the rise, because consumers today want choice and control of the product they consume. Some will argue that provincial and federal laws that require pasteurization of milk violate the constitutional rights of individuals to make their own food choices. You decide.

In America, although federal law bans interstate commerce in raw milk, a patchwork of state laws apply, with sales of raw milk legal in about 28 states. A certified system for selling raw milk exists in nearly half of the United States. Depending on the state, Americans can purchase and farmers can sell raw milk. It's a system raw milk activists here are now fighting for. Should Ontarians have the right to choose whether they want to drink raw milk or pasteurized milk? Should we counter the thriving underground market by instituting a certified process that would allow the government to monitor which local farms are producing raw milk safely? It could certainly address the issue of public health. You decide.

I say this, and you will agree: It is essential to make milk, all milk, safe to consume, because raw milk could, like any other food we consume—meat, water, chocolate, and vegetables like spinach and carrots, all of which were recalled over the past few months—pose a risk of bacterial outbreak.

I want to discuss why we're here today. Why is this such a big topic?

As you know, Speaker, and a lot of other people know, in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound we had an incident about a month ago where 20 armed officers of the Ministry of Natural Resources raided a farm near Durham. The farm was owned by Michael Schmidt, who happens to be sitting here in the balcony today listening to the debate. I'm sure he's interested in how people vote on this. But anyway, they raided his farm—again, about 20 officers carrying firearms. It was a shock when I read

in the paper that this happened, because in Bruce and Grey we have a hard time finding a conservation officer when we need one. You probably know yourself, Mr. Speaker, that we're short around 80 conservation officers right across Ontario. Yet somewhere, somehow, they found 20 of them and raided Mr. Schmidt's farm. Now they have charged him—I don't know what the actual charges are—and he'll have to go to court and face that music, whether he's guilty of the charge or not. That's another whole item. But what it has done is it has sparked a debate. What it has shown us, if you read the media and watch television and things like that, is that there are a lot of people in Ontario drinking raw milk, whether it's legal or whether it's not.

I understand a lot of dairy farmers themselves actually drink their own milk, but that's not illegal. They can do that and that's fine. But maybe we should look at this whole situation surrounding raw milk. I'm not saying, again, as I started off, that people should drink raw milk or they shouldn't. I think that's what we have to decide here in the House. That's why we get elected. When there is a problem in your constituency or in your riding or in Ontario, I think it's up to us as politicians to bring that problem here, bring it to where we debate it and look at it. Maybe we have to make some laws; maybe we leave it alone. I don't know. But if we don't debate it and if we don't look at the situation, then things carry on. As we know, a lot of people seem to want to drink raw milk or are drinking raw milk. So if it's as bad as the doctors have said—there have been many editorials that say it's really bad for you and it could carry disease. We know in the past it did. Before they brought in pasteurization, we know there were problems, but that was 70 years ago. So I think it's time for a debate in this House on this.

1010

All I'm asking for is that we have a committee drawn up between all three parties and we go and look at the issue and we come back here in the spring. Why not bring our results, whatever they may be, back to this House, back for more debate, and then we look at that? What we come up with, I have no idea. I have no idea what we may come up with, but I think it deserves looking at. Because if there are many people out there drinking this now and we in this House do nothing as legislators and somebody gets sick and dies, then it is our responsibility because we did nothing and stood by and knew there were things going on that may have been a problem.

So I think it is up to us to look at the situation. That's what we do when we have problems like this, or we have in the past: We have looked at other problems. I can't see what would be wrong with a task force made up of one from each party and maybe an alternate or something. We will adjourn this House next week and we'll come back in the spring. We have time to go and look at the issues around raw milk. I'm sure there are going to be lots of people lining up to tell us pro or con. But then it's up to us here in this House to make laws. That's what we

do. We do it every day. We debate a bill here every day and it either passes or is defeated, and it's a law for the people of Ontario.

I think we have a problem. I think it's my job as a politician to bring it to the House. All I'm asking for is that we sit down and look at it in a non-partisan way, because this is not a partisan issue. I'm sure people from all three parties may be drinking this milk; I don't know. Let's go out and look. But if we do it in a non-partisan way, then I think we can come up with some ideas of what we should do. As I say, I have no preconceived ideas of what should be done. I just think this House should do this, and this is the way we do it. This is our democratic process. This is private members' time, and I have a private member's resolution. We will vote for this resolution at noon. We won't vote till noon; we'll have a chance to debate it around here until 11 o'clock and then we'll vote at noon. Then, hopefully it will pass and the government in its wisdom will set up a task force for this winter so we can go across Ontario and look at the issue of raw milk. That's all I want; nothing more, nothing less. I would hope that when the time comes all three parties can support this, because I don't have any preconceived ideas. I just know there are people out there saying, "We want this choice." So it's up to us to look at it. I appreciate it, and I will be here for the wrap-up.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to get some words on the record today. I'd just like to start off by looking at the science behind pasteurized milk. It was Louis Pasteur, a French chemist and microbiologist, who published a paper in 1861. He was credited with the process of pasteurization, which bears his name. While researching the causes of spoilage for the wine industry, he conducted experiments with fermentation and spoilage. He discovered that the cause of the spoilage was bacteria floating in the air. This led to pasteurization, or the gentle heating and cooling of the product. He discovered that pasteurization killed pathogenic bacteria. His work saved the wine and beer industry in France, and milk producers adopted his methods and applied them to their industry.

We know that raw milk is heated to a temperature of 63 degrees Celsius for a maximum of 30 minutes and then cooled to 40 degrees Fahrenheit or four degrees Celsius, and then it becomes pasteurized milk.

I want to get on the record some of the experts who have conducted extensive scientific research in this area. Health Canada, in its annual update of August 1, 2006, reminds Canadians about the risks of drinking raw milk:

"Raw (unpasteurized) milk ... could contain bacteria that can make you seriously ill.

"Several different kinds of bacteria that could be found in raw milk, such as salmonella, E. coli and listeria, have been linked to food-borne illness. These bacteria can lead to very serious health conditions ranging from fever, vomiting and diarrhea to life-threatening kidney failure, miscarriage and death.

"Because of these health concerns, food and drug regulations require that all milk available for sale in Canada be pasteurized."

Another expert, Doug Powell, who is the scientific director of the food safety network for the University of Guelph:

"Powell has observed that raw milk drinkers often tout the benefits of better nutrition or taste, but there is no scientific evidence to support these ideas. The risks of serious infection are often downplayed by the farmers who sell raw milk. They often declare that they have been drinking raw milk their whole life. In fact, when an outbreak is traced back to a particular farm, it is often found that the farm family has been drinking the unpasteurized milk without developing symptoms. This is because repeated exposure to micro-organisms can lead to a level of immunity, generally following several potentially life-threatening bouts of illness. But this farm family immunity can be misleading. It may provide a level of protection, yet no one's immune system can protect against all micro-organisms found in raw milk. Powell cautions that people with weak immune systems," particularly the elderly and children, "are particularly at risk."

Pasteurization came about in 1938. It came about when the then Premier of Ontario, Mitchell Hepburn, visited two hospitals in Toronto. He visited Sick Kids Hospital and Toronto General Hospital, and he viewed row upon row upon row of cots of children who had been impacted by the effects of drinking raw milk and the disease tuberculosis, which they had contracted. So in the throne speech of 1938, with his government, he brought in pasteurization to make sure that all Ontario would be protected.

Indeed, the medical officer of health in Durham region, Dr. Murray McQuigge, who became quite famous through the Walkerton tragedy, has cautioned about unpasteurized milk.

The scientific evidence is there to support the pasteurization of milk, and I don't believe there's any need for an all-party committee to study it at this time.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I want to rise in support of my colleague's resolution. The reason I believe it's appropriate that we should move forward with this is that, as Mr. Murdoch indicated to the House, that's our responsibility. It's so typical of the Liberal government to say, "Let's not study it. We know enough and we know better. Government knows best." I think the people of Ontario are sick and tired of hearing from a government that tells them what to do and the basis on which to do it because it is they, the government of the day, that tells them how to do it.

I believe that we're not doing our job as legislators if we don't do what Mr. Murdoch is asking us to do, and that's simply to form an all-party committee to study the matter and to get the facts. I disagree with the member opposite who suggests you already have all of the facts, because I don't believe that you do. Why not have an open mind? Why not behave as a legislator with an open

mind, get the facts, study them, and then come back and report to the House? That really is all that is being asked.

I feel that as a member of this Legislature, I have a responsibility to respond to my constituents. I have a number of petitions. I have received a number of letters from constituents who say, "As my member of provincial Parliament, I'm asking you to support this resolution, to look into the matter, and to report back because at issue here is a principle."

1020

That's why I think it's important that we study the matter, and the principle is an individual citizen's freedom of choice as to the kind of food that they consume and to determine where that food should be produced and how it should be produced. Surely, in the province of Ontario today, we want our citizens to at least have that freedom to make a decision, an informed decision, about what they consume. What we don't want is more government telling us what to eat, how to eat it and at what time. That's next: This government is going to tell us when we can consume our food. I think it's time that we simply agreed to take this forward.

I want to read from a letter from one of my constituents; I think they have it right. Here's what they say: "What we would like is this issue to be investigated, for regulations and a system of inspections to be established, and for people to be allowed to make an informed choice." They also say this—and I want the members of the government to please listen to this: "Approximately 30 states, including the state of California where they do have mass distribution of raw milk, and numerous countries in Europe did not legalize the sale of raw milk because they were blindly 'jumping off of a bridge.' They studied the issue and decided to support their citizens' right to make their own health choices. So is looking to these others to attempt to learn what they learned the same as 'jumping off a bridge'? Okay, then let us study it ourselves, and learn our own lessons, but at least let us have an open mind and study the issue, and not ignore it because some people in industry and government would rather not."

Another very important aspect of this is the fact that we have heard over the last number of weeks over and over again—and just this morning, we heard a report that green onions are being eliminated from Taco Bells across North America. Now, this government would say, "We'll eliminate green onions forever because there's a problem." You see, it's not the green onions; it's how they're being handled. And I would suggest that that may well be what we find as we open our minds and investigate this. It's not the raw milk that causes the problem. When there's a problem, I suggest it may be how it's being handled or mishandled. So perhaps what this government should be doing is ensuring that we have the appropriate regulations in place to ensure the proper handling, so that people can in fact make their individual personal choices rather than have government once again move, now into our kitchen. They're everywhere else, and now they're going to move into the kitchen and tell us how to conduct our lives.

I think it's fundamentally wrong. I support this resolution because it's open-minded. It simply is saying to the Legislature, "Let's get the facts and then behave responsibly and ensure that the people of Ontario are protected, while allowing them their freedom of choice."

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Well, after listening to that speech and after hearing those arguments, I know I'm on the right side not being on that side. My Lord.

Just to the points that the previous speaker raised—first of all, I'm a New Democrat. I'm not here to defend the government. I have a lot of arguments with the government. But to suggest that any government, including this government, has a jackboots approach to telling people how they are to live, I think, is a little bit beyond the pale. I listen to those things and it sounds to me quite inflammatory, in the opposite direction. I am actually kind of upset, thinking about it. But the point he makes is that government is trying to tell people what to do. Well, governments are here to make sure there is public safety. If you take a look at what we've done over the years, governments have decided some things in the common good of the people.

For example, this House, including the Conservatives, voted in favour in order to ban smoking in public buildings. Is that not telling people how to live their lifestyles? We did that for a reason: because we recognize that, first of all, smoking for individuals and second-hand smoke is a public health issue. We said as a Legislature, and rightfully so—as a former smoker from 15 years ago and 60 pounds later—that smoking is bad for you and we've got to get people off that habit. We recognized that it has been an allowed substance for years and years and that people have been hooked and addicted to it with the consent of government. We needed to find a way to give people incentives to stop smoking, and one of the ways of doing that was to limit their ability to smoke in public places and other areas. As a result, there are far fewer people smoking today than there were, let's say, 10 years ago. As a health issue, that's a good thing.

So for the member from the Conservative Party to argue that somehow it's bad for government to put policies and laws in place that are in the public good when it comes to health and safety or other issues is way beyond the pale and I've really got to disagree. If I had an inkling to support this, just on the basis of that speech I've got to vote against the motion.

I do want to say, however, that there is an issue here, and that is that there is a growing movement, and rightfully so, of people who want to go back to organic products. People want to go to their farmers' markets and buy foods, vegetables or meats or whatever it might be, that were not chemically altered by the processes of huge farms trying to push growth in cattle to a higher yield in terms of the overall time it takes for an animal to be brought to market, or on the issue of vegetables, the same. Yes, we need to do something to make that easier for people, and that is a whole other issue. But to somehow or other equate, in this debate, that raw milk is the

same thing as organic milk—let's be clear. Organic milk has to be pasteurized. Let's not forget that. I look at some of the people up there who support this particular motion. Even if a person wants organic milk, we need to pasteurize it. It's something we do. It's a standard. To somehow try to mix into the debate that this is an "anti" movement, that because government says pasteurization has to happen and has been doing so for many years, it's somehow against the idea of allowing people to buy organic products—let's not lose the baby with the bathwater. We still pasteurize organic milk, and let's remember that.

Now to the debate. I understand what the member is trying to do here. I commend him to a great degree. Mr. Murdoch is one of the members in the House who always speaks his mind and, quite frankly, tries to do what is right. I accept much of his argument in regard to what he brings forward, but the problem I have is that it does fly in the face of what we already know from past practice and by way of science. We know, for example, that in the United States, where states have allowed raw milk to be sold on the open market, there's a much higher level of disease. We don't have to go out and study it in Ontario to know what is happening already in other parts of the world. The stats are there already. After a conversation with my good friend Mr. Murdoch last night at the Trillium Foundation event, I went back to my apartment in the evening and did a bit of looking up on the Internet to check this out. One of the interesting things I found in the debate on blogs and other places is that if you go back and correlate what is happening in states where raw milk is allowed to be sold and used, there's a higher degree of disease, things like tuberculosis, E. coli and others. People have actually died. For us in Ontario to say we want to look at that—I understand that we should always look at things, but you also have to look at what is already happening in other jurisdictions and what is happening with science. We know, for example, that prior to pasteurization here in Ontario, tuberculosis was a huge issue. Of all tuberculosis cases that were diagnosed in children, in those that died 10% came from milk. After pasteurization, that went to zero. It's a public health issue. That's how we have to look at this particular issue.

I say to my honourable colleague that I understand what he is trying to do, but we also have to look at what science and other jurisdictions have to say on this particular issue. Where we know raw milk has been allowed to be used, it has not been what people think it is. It's not entirely safe. If people are talking about organic milk, fine, you pasteurize it, but it's a very different issue.

The other issue, and this is one of the things I want to raise for the people in the farm community, is the whole issue of the supply management system. Supply management for dairy farmers is hugely important. Quite frankly, it is the only way those farmers are able to survive and know they can make the kinds of investments they have to make in their farms to be able to stay afloat.

Part of what this debate represents—if we were to say, "Let's go to raw milk," it's a backdoor approach to opening up or destroying the supply management system. This

is part of the problem I had when I listened to Mr. Klees. Some of those guys are so far right that they would go as far as saying, "Get rid of supply management." I, for one, don't want to be a party to anything that is going to destroy the supply management system in the dairy industry, because doing that will kill all the family farms. We don't need the mega-farms run by the large industries that want to get into it; we need the family farm out there, and supply management is one of those things that allows that to happen. Without supply management, in many of our ridings across Ontario, even in my riding in north-eastern Ontario where we do have dairy farming, it would mean the death of the small family farm.

1030

I heard the previous member in the Conservative caucus talk about choice and about the freedom of choice. Those are just buzzwords to say, "Let's open up the market and do what the heck we want." We do put some conditions on the market to make sure the little guy doesn't get walked on by the big guy every now and then. I know that; I come from the forest industry in northern Ontario. The large forest companies now control everything. Look what's going on. We're being decimated in northern Ontario, greatly because of what this government does, but also because those companies have gotten so big that they're a virtual monopoly and they get to decide what's going to happen. If they can operate with three mills and make more money than they did with five mills, they're going to drop down to three. I'm all for competition, and one of the things that allows that to happen is the supply management system.

It was interesting. I was going through the Internet last night and I just happened to pick up the papers this morning, and there was an interesting article, which was referred to earlier. One of the things I heard about, but I think it needs to be said for the record, is that we do know of some cases—in Barrie there have been at least four cases where children have been taken to hospital because they've become sick from drinking raw milk. It brings me to the point the member makes. He says he wants to go back and study this. I think there's already enough evidence out there that it's not something we really want to do. We would only be kidding ourselves and raising expectations falsely if we were to allow this to happen.

My last point, which I want to make to those people who are either watching this, reading Hansard later or who are here, is let's not be confused about this process. I will say this outright: If this motion were to pass today, you wouldn't get a committee. It wouldn't happen. Many motions have been passed in this House during private members' hour that the government ignores anyway. The government, at the end of the day, decides what's going to be called before a committee. This would be one of many issues that a committee would have to deal with. Committees now have government bills before them. It's the last session before an election. We're going to have another session in the spring and we're going to be into an election next fall. There are government bills and plenty

more private members' bills ahead of this particular motion. To give people the expectation that "If only this motion had passed we would have got our fair say"—it would never have come to the light of day. This motion today could be voted for with 100% acceptance by this Legislature and it wouldn't get a committee hearing, because there's far more committee business in front of those committees—

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): No, it's a new all-party committee. You missed the whole point.

Mr. Bisson: If you think an all-party committee is going to be created for this, you're sadly mistaken. I've been here as long as you, sir, since 1990, and I know that all-party committees happen very rarely in this place, and all-party committees are normally to deal with fairly large issues, such as the constitutional committee back in the early 1990s. I think we've only had one since. I just say to the people watching this—

Mr. Wilson: We had one on electricity.

Mr. Bisson: That's what I'm saying: We had another one afterwards, and it was during your term. But they're normally for very, very large issues. So I don't think this thing would even get there, should we vote for it in the affirmative. Thank you.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): I certainly am very pleased to get involved in this debate. I want to speak from some experiences I've had in my own riding.

In April 1986, a kindergarten class in Lambton county had an outbreak of E. coli 0157:H7 after the class had been on a field trip to a dairy farm where the children had been given samples of raw milk. Several of the children got sick. They had gastrointestinal problems; quite frankly, they had bloody diarrhea, which, as any parent knows, is extremely dangerous. Four of the adults who accompanied the children also had a problem. Three of the children were hospitalized, with one ending up in the ICU, and one of the children has permanent damage as a result.

The families of these children suffered, but so did the entire farm community. First there was the real worry that one or more of the children would die. Then, once that concern had passed, there was the worry about liability. Suddenly, farmers were reluctant to participate in a program we had in the area called Agriculture in the Classroom, which included field trips to farms. And of course the dairy farmers in the community were very concerned about the public perception of milk. They wanted to make sure the image of milk hadn't been changed, that the image stayed as being safe and wholesome. One of the things that happened in the community was that farmers were very reluctant to offer any kinds of raw products to anybody who visited their farms.

These weren't isolated incidents. This was in 1986, but as recently as April 2005, there was a similar outbreak in the Barrie area.

Some people will tell you that there is no harm in drinking raw milk. The media speaks of how clean farm operations are, especially those operations that use the

process of people buying shares in a cow to access the raw milk. I have no doubt that these are clean farms; of course they're clean farms. My parents were Dutch immigrants and they prided themselves on their cleanliness. I can remember, as a child, my sisters and I being handed broad brushes and a pail of whitewash and told to go and whitewash the stone walls in the interior of our dairy barn. My mom would don a scarf over her head and would go chasing cobwebs with a broom. They kept that barn very, very clean. But the fact is that I also remember my dad using a pail and a stool to do the milking. It depended a great deal on the disposition of the cow. Some cows were calm, but some would get impatient with the milking process and would start to swat their tails or kick their hind feet up, and every so often something would fall into the pail. It could be straw or another contaminant that lies on the floor of barns, but it would get there. It makes me wonder, what happens now? My mother boiled that milk. She understood that that milk could be contaminated. She understood all the perils that were around it and she made sure she boiled that milk.

Ontario has a very good history in food safety. In 1896, Adelaide Hoodless lost her 14-month-old son to a disease he contracted as a result of drinking raw milk. Ms. Hoodless became the founder of the largest rural farm women's organization in the world. Ms. Hoodless is the founder of the Women's Institute. The Women's Institute, as everyone knows, started their years by teaching women how to prepare foods properly and safely for their children. As a result of that, Premier Mitch Hepburn in 1938 legislated the pasteurization of milk. That's how we came to that point. That's what brought it about: Adelaide Hoodless. She made sure that everyone understood the dangers of raw milk.

As the member from Timmins-James Bay has said, there is a clear difference between raw milk and organic milk, and we need to remember that. I understand the movement to go back to drinking and eating natural foods, but we need to understand that safety also needs to be attached to this. I want to say for the people in this Legislature, I have had no calls at my constituency office from constituents on this issue. I think they all remember 1986 and those kindergarten children in Lambton county.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on this debate this morning on raw milk. As agriculture critic, I want to start by stating very clearly that John Tory and our entire PC caucus unequivocally support supply management. Dairy farmers were here recently and they made their position very clear yet again. Supply management, in contrast to what some members opposite have said, is untouchable, from our perspective. Every PC MPP signed the Farm-Gate5 supply management petition and will continue to defend supply management whenever necessary. I don't know whether this issue would have relevance for that or not. That's something that may well come out if this Legislature decides to strike a task force.

1040

Again, we are debating whether the government of Ontario should create an all-party task force to examine

the issues around raw milk and then table its findings to the House prior to the spring session of this Parliament. Just to clarify, there are a number of things we're not debating today. We're not debating the health merits of raw milk necessarily; we're not debating whether we should allow raw milk in stores; we're not debating whether Ontario should allow for mass distribution of raw milk. We're simply debating whether or not this Legislative Assembly would like to learn more about the issues surrounding raw milk through an all-party committee. From what I can see, we've got nothing to fear and essentially everything to gain by learning more about this—or any other issue, for that matter.

Recently, we saw in this Legislature that the current government doesn't like to hear input. I think of Bill 107; we saw a case there where people who wanted to testify before that committee were not allowed to do so. On the contrary, I support the idea that we as legislators owe it to our constituents to make informed decisions on their behalf, at least to do the best we can with the evidence presented. Studying the issues around raw milk is not a policy decision; it's essentially giving us an opportunity to do a bit of homework. It's entirely possible the all-party task force would return to the Legislature and confirm that people were right back in 1938. That's when the Ontario health act made it illegal to sell or give away raw milk.

I suspect many MPPs have received e-mails, communications on raw milk; I certainly have. I've read e-mails supporting the issue; I've read e-mails opposing it. I am aware of some of the health aspects. We hear about salmonella. There are certainly instances of children dying from E. coli, perhaps contracted through raw milk. Today's debate does not deny the existence of those health concerns. If anything, it would give us an opportunity, and a task force would give us an opportunity, to learn more about some of these disease and bacterial concerns. It gives the health officials a platform to reinforce their concerns about raw milk. It would give consumers—I know consumers are probably present here today—an opportunity to make their case, if they so choose, with respect to the regulated delivery of milk.

Other visitors here today—dairy farmers, landowners. The task force would give farmers an access point to MPPs and an opportunity to explain how the raw milk debate would fit into issues like supply management. Again, how can we defend farmers and supply management if we don't give them an opportunity to present their case in a forum?

I don't drink raw milk; I don't intend to start. We also milked cows. I remember the pasteurization, the milk thermometer. We always pasteurized our milk on the stove—we drank the milk from our own cows. So other than insight, I don't have anything to gain by studying this issue around raw milk. Neither myself nor my wife, Cari, have invested money in a raw milk co-operative. I have given this debate a lot of thought, however, and I do intend to vote in favour of this resolution from MPP Bill Murdoch. If it's passed, if the government decides to

respect the will of the Legislative Assembly, I really would look forward to learning more about milk. If the task force recommends maintaining the status quo, that's acceptable to me. If anything, it would provide an extra layer of legitimacy to a system that has been in place since 1938.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): It's my privilege to speak about this issue today. I think there are several parts to the discussion; one, I would say, is the treatment of Mr. Schmidt himself. That's a discussion in itself. I come from a district in Parkdale-High Park where, even with increased police presence, we can't keep our streets safe for our seniors to come out of their homes at night. I wonder about this incredible deployment of force over this issue, and I decry it. That's number one.

Number two is the validity of the cause itself. Of course, I hear from my colleagues to the right of me, and that's symbolic as well as actual, "It's only about opening up the discussion," but the reality is that this House has limited time. You heard my colleague Mr. Bisson speak about this issue and talk about how limited the time is. There are a number of issues before this House. There are issues like my private member's bill for a \$10-an-hour living wage. There are issues like why we don't have housing for 120,000 households in this province. There are issues like why 13,500 children who use food banks have the right to eat at all, never mind drink raw milk versus pasteurized milk. I consider all of those issues to take precedence over this one. On that basis alone, I wouldn't support this motion. Again, we're only sitting for another five days and then in the spring we're only sitting for how many weeks, and even over the winter months to try to get hearings around here on some of these issues is like pulling teeth. Again, it's nothing against Mr. Murdoch. I understand him to be a fine member speaking up for the constituency here, but we just don't have time to look at this. This isn't an issue of precedence.

I also understand that science is a variable art form, let's say, in some instances. When I was pregnant with my daughter, who is now 29, I read a book by Benjamin Spock that said drinking wine during pregnancy is fine. There was a noted medical authority. By the time I had my son, five years later, of course it was anathema, and we know now that it's a very dangerous practice. Science changes and scientific answers change. I am a great supporter of organic foods and making the pledge to be vegetarian in the new year and trying to support my health food stores and health food providers.

I did some very careful research. I spent many hours last night and all of this week. I've received e-mails from my constituents on both sides of the issue as well and looked at what's happening and where it's happening. One of the things I noticed—because certainly Mr. Schmidt and his supporters have drawn my attention to what is happening in the States, so I looked at what was happening there and this is what I found. I found that almost all of the states that do allow raw milk production

and distribution, certainly more than we do here in Ontario, are now considering outright bans. I quote from the *Columbian*, from Washington state:

"The 2007 Legislature is certain to take a fresh look at banning raw milk sales in Washington because of two outbreaks this year that have been linked to unpasteurized milk.

"Last month, a 5-year-old Issaquah boy and an 8-year-old girl from Snohomish county contracted *E. coli* bacteria by drinking raw milk...."

This is in Washington state, but it isn't only Washington state. Then I looked at some of the other states that, again, are looser, more lax about this than we are and I see that California has just—well, this is not just; this is going on a year—quarantined the state's largest raw milk producer, and also legislators there are looking at bans or something approximating bans. I don't know that bans are the answer either, really. Obviously, this is an issue that needs to be looked at in terms of how one regulates and polices, and there's a discussion to be had there, not here, but certainly a discussion, again, going back to the treatment of Mr. Schmidt and how we enforce our rules and regulations.

That we need our rules and regulations I think really is uncontested. And here is the ultimate reason that we need rules and regulations: Wherever one child is at risk, wherever one child suffers, wherever one child could potentially lose kidney function, then surely as humane individuals, as parents ourselves, we have to act. I don't think, for a variety of reasons, that it's worth reopening this question. I think the answer has been settled. I wouldn't go so far as to say, as Dr. McQuigge does, that this is equivalent to manslaughter, but personally I am satisfied. Nothing has stopped it—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Further debate?

1050

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): Once again, I commend the member opposite for bringing this resolution forward, because I know he is thinking of the better interests for all. I think you've heard most of the debates, the pros and cons, from both sides. But I'm going to speak about—I guess the best way is to tell a story about some personal experiences, because it brings it home. Probably most of you in this House know that I am an immigrant to this country, and back where I was born, in Italy, we did have our own cows, our own chickens, our own eggs and those kinds of things, and I used to drink milk. But even my mother would boil the milk on the wood stove or over the wood fireplace. Back in 1960, when I first immigrated to Canada, I had my very first taste of homo milk at my uncle's house, on the very first day I landed. That's the day I stopped drinking milk. It was like water. It was too much. I guess the point I'm making is that even back in Italy, although I don't think pasteurization was across the board there, we recognized that it was something we had to do.

The other piece that I want to talk about briefly is that, back in 2005, in the town that I represent—I happen to live in Brighton, just east of Toronto in the county of

Northumberland. We have a really huge fall festival, Applefest. We used to be known for orchards and so forth, although we don't have that many any more, but we still celebrate the apple product. A number of vendors were selling unpasteurized apple cider. The health unit officer visited the vendors, and all the apple cider was removed from the vendors' stands. I can tell you that on Monday morning when I came to my office, a lot of these folks who had those stands selling apple cider were really upset. My phone was swarmed with about half a dozen of them and their supporters and their staff, saying that they'd been doing this for years, and all of a sudden the health unit comes in with, let's say, a heavy hand.

As I was working through the process for my constituents to try to see how we could—they'd been doing this for years, and all of a sudden they've got this restriction. About a month later in Durham—and this is going back not even two years—I don't remember the fruit stand, but they were selling unpasteurized apple cider and somebody got E. coli. I can tell you that I got back to every one of those folks who phoned me about the apple cider. These are folks I know. They're my neighbours. They're the farmers or processors that I meet. We're a month, a month and a half apart, and here's what happened: The subject just died because they understood.

I guess the point I'm trying to make is that we live in a society where people depend on governments to put rules and regulations in place, although we may not like them, for the safety of the community. We've heard pros and cons today. We have a lot of evidence. But to go through this and have politicians make those decisions, I'm not so sure it's the right direction. So as much as I appreciate what the member's trying to do, I think the evidence is pretty clear, and I can't support this.

Mr. Wilson: It's my pleasure to support this resolution brought forward by my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Mr. Murdoch.

As my colleague from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant pointed out, we're not debating supply management today. I was one of the first caucus members to sign Farm-Gate 5, the umbrella group that covers our supply-managed commodities. All members of the PC caucus have done that, even our newest members who came in in recent by-elections. So we're not debating that.

I'm very proud that my predecessor was George McCague and that his father was Jack McCague, who was one of the first chairmen—I think the first—of the Ontario Milk Marketing Board, which started in my home community of Alliston. But that's not what we're debating. We're really debating freedom.

As my colleague Mr. Klees said, James Wallace of the Barrie Examiner points out in an article that there's a considerable underground movement going on right now, whether we like it or not, of people using and drinking raw milk. We've seen, through Mr. Schmidt and some of his friends and colleagues, some world-class chefs that like to use the product. The fact that we're having disagreements today about whether or not we should even form an all-party committee—a new committee, not a

busy committee; it just needs a couple of members from each party to examine this issue—and the fact that we're having differences, to me, speaks volumes that it's an issue we should look at. It's appropriate, and it's our duty, as Mr. Murdoch said, to do such things when called upon by the people of Ontario.

In the two minutes I have, I just want to read a letter that I received. I actually have five constituents who live at RR 3 Tottenham who wrote to me on December 5 indicating that they're shareholders in Glencolton Farms and would very much like to see this issue debated:

"Dear Mr. Wilson:

"We are writing to you to inform about a regrettable event that took place on Tuesday November 21, 2006 at the Glencolton Farms, near Durham. We are writing to you to defend our rights as citizens and to defend farmer Michael Schmidt.

"We are part of a larger group of about 150 families who are cow shareowners at the Glencolton Farms: The cow share program enables us to obtain our own fresh milk from the farm while Glencolton provides shelter, feed and care for our animals.

"On November 21, Glencolton Farms was raided as part of an 18-month investigation triggered by an incident not connected to this farm and not connected to farm fresh milk, the details of which were suspected but never proven. All milk products, processing equipment, documents and other items were confiscated from the farm leaving us, the shareholders, who have relied on the farm to deliver us lab quality-controlled biodynamic milk and cheese every week since the mid 1990s, deprived of essential nourishing.

"For a better understanding related to this matter please visit the farm's website at www.glencoltonfarms.com, where you can find Michael Schmidt's statement and continuous updates with regards to press conferences, signed petitions and the incredible support offered by other people in the community.

"Following up on his statement made at the press conference on November 23, 2006, farmer Michael Schmidt has begun a hunger strike.

"On December 7 there will be a private member's bill introduced at Queen's Park by Bill Murdoch, MPP from the Grey-Bruce area, that asks to examine the issue around the availability of real milk to the citizens of Ontario.

"We ask you to please support Bill Murdoch's private member's bill so a task force can be set up to proactively deal with the larger raw milk issue.

"Thanking you in advance for consideration and support."

That's from Olga Shibanova, George Davydenko, Vera Chibanova, George Shibanov and Alexei Davydenko. I apologize if I've mispronounced those names, but those are the five constituents.

It's my duty to bring these matters forward, and I support the resolution. I just don't understand. When I was energy minister, we had an all-party committee examine issues in the electricity and energy sector. It has

happened around here. It doesn't take a lot of our resources, and I think people want to be heard on this issue.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Milk is Mother Nature's perfect food, but only pasteurized milk is guaranteed to be safe.

If people came to this House and said, "We should have a review of whether or not it's a good idea to put your tongue on a frozen fence post," I would say, "We don't have to spend any time on that." If someone said, "We should have a review about whether or not you should take metal objects and put them into live electrical outlets," I would say, "We don't have to spend time reviewing that." If someone came to me and said, "Let's review exactly how closely aligned some members of the Conservative caucus are with the Ontario Landowners Association," I'd say, "We don't have to review that either." If people say to me, "Should we review whether or not unpasteurized milk should be in the food supply?" I'd say, "No, we don't have to review that."

I stand with the Premier of Ontario. I stand with the medical officers of health of Ontario and with the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in the great province of Ontario. I stand with them to say that it's a crazy idea that we should actually spend time in this House debating something that was settled 68 years ago. When the Progressive Conservative Party was in power for 42 years subsequent, did they think this was a good idea to review? No. Did the NDP government think it was a good idea? Does our government? No.

It's very, very clear: We do not now allow unsafe milk to be in the food supply. Our children are depending on us.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Murdoch, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Murdoch: I'd like to just thank everybody who took part in this debate. At least we had a bit of a debate. Obviously, the government of the day is going to turn this down and doesn't want to debate it any longer.

It's strange that our member from Perth over there tries to grandstand on an issue that somebody may just die over, but he wants to grandstand because he knows everything. He just thinks he knows everything, and that's unfortunate.

1100

I am a little shocked at the NDP's position on this, but they have the right to do that if they want. I just want to tell you that the issue is not what we're debating here today. The issue is whether we should look at the issues around raw milk. Obviously with the number of people who are here today—and normally in private members' hour we don't see a lot of people here—there is an issue out there. If the government of the day doesn't want to look at it, I can't make them. I can only ask them to do that. They've decided in their wisdom they don't want to look at this issue. All I can say is that if somebody dies because they drank raw milk, it's on their heads, on the government's head, on the Liberals' heads, on McGuinty's head, because he doesn't even want to look at the issue. He thinks this has all been solved because 70 years ago

we made a decision. Maybe something's changed in 70 years, maybe not. All I'm asking is that we look at it—not taking any position at all, but just look at it. But we have a government that's closed, doesn't want to do anything, and that's unfortunate.

I want to tell you, though, that the National Farmers Union supported the resolution, the Christian Farmers supported the resolution, and lots of media. On CFOS last week, we had a debate where 20-some people phoned in, and most of them thought the resolution was fine. They didn't have opinions. All those other groups don't have opinions. They want to look at it. That's all we're here for as politicians: to look at these issues. Unfortunately, it seems the government doesn't want to.

PROTECTING VULNERABLE WORKERS ACT (EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES), 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LA PROTECTION DES TRAVAILLEURS VULNÉRABLES (AGENCES DE PLACEMENT)

Mr. Dhillon moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 161, An Act respecting employment agencies /
Projet de loi 161, Loi concernant les agences de placement.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Dhillon, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): I rise today to discuss a matter that is very near and dear to me, as it affects many people in my riding and, as I've learned, in Ontario as well.

I want to begin, first of all, by thanking Mr. Ravinder Pannu, who is the owner of the Sur Sagar Radio program. It's the only 24-hour Punjabi channel in Ontario. He's doing a wonderful job. He's taken on many issues in the Indian community which in turn have helped the community. He's also taken this issue on and he's provided me a great amount of assistance. As a matter of fact, a couple of weeks ago I went on the show and my bill was the topic of the show. We got many, many calls. I'm sure if we had gone on for another hour or two, the calls would have kept coming. Again, I want to thank Mr. Pannu, who is a pioneer of broadcasting in the Sikh community, the Indian community.

As I begin debate on my private member's bill, Bill 161, Protecting Vulnerable Workers Act (Employment Agencies), I hope I can count on members' support, as it affects some of the most vulnerable in our society: women, immigrants and visible minorities. They're excessively represented in the lowest-paying and in the most insecure forms of work. I believe this bill would help provide much-needed oversight in this, as of the present, unregulated industry.

The purpose of the bill is to establish a licensing scheme for the control and regulation of businesses that operate as employment agencies. An employment agency

means both businesses that bring together employees seeking jobs and potential employers, and temporary help agencies that contract out persons to organizations.

Bill 161 would set out requirements for employment agencies to obtain an operating licence from the Ministry of Labour. A licence may be refused if the company's past conduct suggests that the company will not carry on its business in accordance with the law and with honesty and integrity or if there's some question about the financial viability of the company.

There's currently no legislation specific to employment agencies, as they are subject to regulations that apply to any business operating in Ontario. While there used to be legislation specific to employment agencies in the past—the Employment Agencies Act, 1990—it was repealed by the Employment Standards Act, 2000. Reasons for its repeal are outlined in the Ministry of Labour's 2000 consultation paper *Time for Change: Ontario's Employment Standards Legislation*. I quote from the recommendations:

"The Employment Agencies Act was enacted to prevent the exploitation of individuals seeking jobs."

I continue the same quote: "The Ministry of Labour has rarely received complaints under the EAA."

"Changes in this industry, such as the shift toward greater use of the Internet to assist in job searches, and the enactment of legislation to address discrimination, have largely eliminated the need for this act."

"Accordingly, the government intends to repeal the Employment Agencies Act."

The ministry at that time may not have received complaints, but I certainly have, and many of them. Over the past several years I've received many complaints of fraudulent, fly-by-night employment agencies and situations where employees are not paid for work, wages are below the legal minimum wage, there's no public holiday pay, no overtime pay, and their health and safety are jeopardized.

It is difficult to estimate the size of the temporary agency workforce, but there is an estimate of about 1,300 employment agencies that operate in Ontario, and the size of this industry continues to grow. Moreover, an increasing number of employers use temporary agency workers on a long-term basis. It is absolutely imperative that Ontario get back into the business of regulating this industry. Many provinces, such as Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, and many US jurisdictions, including California, Maryland, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Massachusetts and New York, have detailed laws on the books that strictly regulate employment agencies.

The law was adopted many years ago to curb abuses associated with temporary job placement firms. The approach we have now is a complaints-based system through the Ministry of Labour. This issue is one of the most important to me and my riding. In light of this, shortly after becoming an MPP I attended my first cabinet committee meeting, which involved the Ministry of Labour. I brought this issue up immediately with a per-

son named Adam McDonald, who is employed by the ministry. I wanted to do something about the abuse that's being suffered by my constituents and many other people in Ontario.

I received a letter back which gave an explanation of what people can do: It had a 1-800 number, a website and other information. But that simply is not enough, because many of the people who work in these employment agencies are new immigrants. They're not used to the system. They don't have a computer. Some of them cannot speak English, so it's very difficult for these people to just have a 1-800 number to complain to. So they end up with the status quo and continue to suffer the abuse because they have to provide for their family. They're often too proud to go on social assistance and would rather do two jobs instead of one to provide for their families.

Again, I received a lot of complaints. As evidence of this, as I stated before, I went on a live TV call-in show, and the calls were flooding in. I'm sure that we could have gone on for several hours after the show to hear about the horror stories that people had to tell as a result of the questionable practices of these fly-by-night, fraudulent employment agencies.

As recently as two nights ago I met Steve Webster, who lives in a town near Windsor. He told me of people being brought in as temp help from the GTA who were working on farms. The conditions, the circumstances that he described to me, were simply horrendous. People were being asked to work long hours, being paid as little as \$4 an hour. This is simply not acceptable. This goes beyond providing somebody a minimum wage and beyond employment standards, the rules and regulations. We have to really think about what this means for Ontario and Canada. Is this what we want to portray to the world about who we are? We always complain about child labour and other issues in China and other countries. We always complain about that. I think it's a really important issue that needs to be looked into further than just the rules. Just to actually see people working in these farms, in those conditions, for one second, is quite disturbing. Most of these people are seniors, and they're being asked to work long hours with no health benefits, which seniors need as they grow older.

1110

Newcomers come to this country for an opportunity. Do we want to start turning away people because of stories that might come out of this type of situation? People don't want to come to Canada to work in the type of conditions that they left in their own countries. Most often, vulnerable workers are not aware of where they can turn to to make a grievance because they're so fearful of the repercussions if they do so. Again I state that Ontario should get back into regulating the industry.

That all being said, employment agencies that follow the Employment Standards Act do play a useful role in our economy. So the good agencies do warrant consideration. They're doing a great job.

I want to quote from Ms. Sylvie Hyndman, the co-owner of Dynamic Employment Services Inc. I think she

made a really good point. This industry “has diluted a valuable industry, an industry that is more than ready and capable of providing a value-adding service to both clients and candidates in need. It is with great anticipation that myself as an employment service owner would welcome some form of regulation.”

In the end, I just want to thank the ministry. They have been doing a great deal of good work, and I thank everyone else who has helped with this. I certainly hope that I can count on everyone's support.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to participate in this debate. At the outset, I would say that I will be supporting this bill because I do believe that there's an important consumer protection element contained in the bill. I also would say to the member that, in reading the bill, I'm disappointed that there is not more in the bill to speak to consequences and empowering the government of Ontario to move with some serious consequences for infractions.

Essentially what we're talking about here is a fraud that is being perpetrated on the most vulnerable in our society. Often, as the member indicated, it's newcomers that we're talking about who come to this country as immigrants. They may well be very well qualified, but are having a difficult time accessing the job market, so they see often in agencies like this a way or a promise to bridge that gap between searching and finding a job, and often are willing to even put significant dollars on the table in the hopes of getting that much-needed job.

In the process now, we're conducting hearings on Bill 124, which the government has brought forward. It deals with the issue of providing better access to newcomers to this province to the regulatory professions. We will, of course, be supporting that bill—the PC caucus will. We're in the process of providing and advancing some amendments that we believe would have improved the bill. It's unfortunate that the government, to this point in time—we're going into the second day of clause-by-clause hearings and not one of our amendments has been accepted by the government, which is really very unfortunate and speaks to the lack of democratic process in this place. But that's a debate for another time.

I want to speak specifically to Mr. Dhillon's bill. One of the reasons that I am supporting this is because, as a member of the Legislature, I too have had examples in my constituency of incredible hardship that is endured by people as a result of their dealings with some of these employment agencies. It's not just labourers, and it's not just people who are at the entry level of jobs who are finding this. In this particular case that I'm going to share with my colleagues, this involved an individual who is highly qualified, is a newcomer—

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): —tell people what to do. Let them do what they want.

Mr. Klees: Speaker, if you would ask the member to kindly keep his words to himself—

Mr. Bisson: I will.

Mr. Klees: —because I will respect him when it's time for him to speak.

Mr. Bisson: I apologize.

Mr. Klees: Thank you.

I am going to share with you an example from my constituency; in this particular case, Mr. Janevski, who met with me on behalf of his wife, Mrs. Marijana Janevski, regarding her experience with an employment assistance agency. I am going to read into the record the name of the agency because I think it's important that people know who is, and has been, dealing in this province and is not dealing in a straightforward manner with the public. The name of the agency is Bernard Haldane Associates. Mrs. Janevski paid \$4,900, plus GST, to this company for services that they said would guarantee her a job. They said, they represented to this woman, that for \$4,900, plus GST, they would assist in the preparation of a CV, they would access certain potential employers who, they represented, aren't in the full job market. This is another approach that many of these agencies take. They'll say, “We're so well connected; 80% of the real job market is never posted, and, because of our relationship with these employers, we can gain access to those people and make the introductions.”

This individual was so convinced by their story that she paid them the \$4,900. To this day, she has yet to get an interview. Not only that, but the company is no longer in business.

Here is the problem—and this is something for the Ministry of Consumer Affairs in this government. After dealing with this, I contacted the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Business Services on her behalf. I said, “Look, this is fraudulent. This is a time for government to step in. Let's get after these people.” I received a letter back from Minister Watson at the time, acknowledging my inquiry and indicating that he has asked the manager in the consumer business service bureau to look into the complaint file.

Here's the problem: That's where it ended, because the next contact that we had with the ministry of consumer services was: “Well, the company has now gone out of business. Because the owners of the company don't live in Ontario, they are from the US, it's very difficult to do anything about it.” Essentially, what happened was that they closed the books on it. So now we have a resident of Ontario defrauded, and our ministry tells us we can't do anything about it.

1120

Here's the other problem: These people resurface time and time again under different corporate structures. I did some research, and it turned out that this company has had similar experiences in numerous states in the United States; that they have lawsuits filed against them in numerous jurisdictions; that they keep popping up, being reincarnated in different forms. I put the question to the ministry here in Ontario to say, “Look, when a company applies for letters of incorporation here, do we not look into whether or not the principals of the company have a track record of fraud? Do we not deny people to incorporate in the province of Ontario if there is an evident track record?” Do you know what the answer is? “No, we

don't. It would be too costly to do that, and we're going to presume that most people are honest."

Well, the fact of the matter is that I believe the ministry of business services has a responsibility to ensure that business is being done in this province in a way that is not going to defraud—how can we simply blindly say, "Go ahead and open up a corporation so you can defraud Ontario citizens"? That doesn't make any sense.

And so I am supporting this bill, because on the one hand I believe that, yes, we do need to have some standards in place. There should be regulations. I am concerned that the bill has not gone far enough. I think there's much more that needs to be done. I would like to see this bill then go into committee so we can deal with those issues and have some witnesses come forward on the record.

Mr. Dhillon talked about a number of people that he spoke to on the air, in terms of sharing their concerns. I would love nothing better than to have this bill in committee. Let's travel with that committee and let's allow people to come forward and tell us about their experiences, and let's get some of the names of these agencies on the record. Let's embarrass them into doing business the right way, because today there are no consequences.

I will be supporting this. I look forward to the rest of the debate. In the final analysis, it is in the interest of protecting very innocent people whose only crime is that they are looking for gainful employment, and we as a Legislature should be doing everything we can to protect them.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): It's my pleasure and privilege to speak about this bill, first and foremost because I used to own a consulting firm. I worked for many years in the employment agency business, and then started my own employment agency and consulting firm, and dealt with many of the major corporations in the city. I did so, I feel, on behalf of those who came and registered with us.

First and foremost, I want to say that there are many, many employment agencies in the city that operate entirely ethically. In fact, back in the late 1980s when I was in business, I paid \$10 an hour, minimum wage, to all of my contract employees. I would like to see the government support that today. Here we are, almost 2007. So I will support this bill.

What do I think about this bill? I think it is a tiny step where a great leap is required, an absolutely tiny step where a great leap is required. Why would I say that? Well, first of all, I would say that because there are no teeth to this bill. This is really just a bill calling for the licensing of an industry. Well, we license all sorts of industries. What does it actually mean? It doesn't mean much if there are no teeth, if there is no enforcement and there is no money behind the enforcement put alongside this bill.

When I hear the story that was described by Mr. Klees, I wonder how this bill would help as it currently stands, how it would help that individual who was taken for \$4,900. Well, the answer is that it probably wouldn't

help her much at all, because there is no money, there is no enforcement, and there is no way she could ever even begin to attempt to get that money back.

I want to step back for a minute, though, and look at the background and a little bit of what's led up to this bill, because I think it is extremely important. I turn to the Star here, which did a major piece about what they call "second-class" workers, workers in the temporary field. They said—and this is an article going back to October 14—that "about 13%—or close to 1.7 million—of Canadian workers are temporary, performing contract, seasonal, casual or agency work. But whereas one in 10 new hires was a temporary worker in 1989"—when I was in business—"that ratio has risen to one in five, according to Statistics Canada."

I continue on with the same article where it talks about agencies: "Agencies range from large and corporate to small and fly-by-night. Several agencies that owed wages to workers were found by the Workers' Action Centre"—a group that does tremendous work—"to be operating out of apartments and basements." These are businesses operating out of apartments and basements. We should be outraged by this. It goes on to say, "The labour ministry receives 15,000 to 20,000 employment standards complaints each year, but Peters said the Liberal government is determined to reduce that by targeting bad employers, including temp agencies." How does it do that? It does that by employing, "144 employment standards inspectors, 20 of whom are on a ... team targeting 2,500 Ontario firms last year...."

Just to give you an indication of how minuscule that response is, again I go to the Star, an editorial this time on Wednesday, the 18th. It says here, "While the McGuinty government has sensibly increased random inspections and prosecutions.... Every year, fewer than 1% of workplaces are inspected." Now, with that kind of track record, how can we possibly expect that anyone who has a complaint about their treatment by an agency—or an employer, for that matter—can ever get justice and their just day? Certainly, unless there are teeth in this bill again it will do very little if nothing at all to address that.

Then we look at the broader picture, if we kind of draw the lens back and look at the big picture, against which this bill is set. We're talking here about Bill 161 that's going to license employment agencies. This is a government bringing in this bill, albeit a private member's bill—a member of the majority government—that will not raise the minimum wage to a living wage. That's the poverty line; that's \$10 an hour. That means that many women, for example, who are the heads of households and who are single parents can't afford to go to work at all. They cannot afford to go to work. They'll lose drug benefits. You heard Mr. Dhillon speak about the lack of benefits that most temporary workers get. These women won't be allowed to get those drug benefits if they go back to work at all, whether through an agency or permanently. They'll lose money and, of course, their children will have to go into day care, questionable day

care, perhaps, because they can't afford the best of day care. So here, this is the background against which we set this bill, that people working at minimum wage can't pay the rent and feed their children. That's number one.

This bill is set against a background of this government where only 30% of all of our labour force is covered by employment insurance. That's the background against which this bill is set—only 30%. We should be outraged and ashamed at that. I know it's federal, but we should be doing everything in our power to change that ratio. That's appalling.

Again, this bill is set against a background of other temporary and contract workers. I think here of our brothers and sisters in OPSEU who are currently engaged in a huge struggle to get contract teachers in community colleges and other places covered by union legislation. It's against the law for part-time workers in colleges to be part of unions. That's the background against which this bill is set. So when I say baby step, I'm talking a very tiny, tiny baby step.

My husband works at a community college. He's a contract worker. I hope he's covered by a \$10-an-hour minimum wage because right now at home he's marking dozens and dozens of papers. He teaches five courses. And, do you know what? He doesn't make nearly as much as a full-time worker, even though he works full-time. This is a huge, black mark against this government. If this government was really concerned about the rights of temporary and part-time workers, it would be doing something about that. These are people with doctorates, these are people with masters, and they're working for government-run, supposedly, community colleges etc., where, again, they're not really making a fair wage, not even close. That has nothing to do with employment agencies whatsoever. That is directly something that this government could do, it could make a move on. I know my colleague Mr. Marchese has a bill before the House dealing with that situation right now.

1130

Again, this bill is set against a background where we don't have status-of-the-artist legislation. I heard some discussion coming from Mr. Dhillon about children. With no status-of-the-artist legislation, artists, anyone who's working in the arts, are some of the poorest people in our community, with an average salary of around \$26,000 to \$27,000 a year, many of whom are going to lose their jobs because there's no income averaging for them. If they have a good year, the next year the government taxes them based on last year—no status-of-the-artist legislation, and, in that, no child protection act at all about children who work in the arts.

This bill, this baby step, aimed at one small sliver of the employment spectrum does nothing about the rights of children who work in the arts, does nothing about the rights of artists who work in the arts, does nothing for that at all. When we take out all of these groups of people and look at this small, little baby step, all it does, even for employment agencies, is expect them to get a licence.

When I opened my agency, I had to get a licence too. Everybody who opens a business has to get a licence.

What does it mean in reality? It means probably about as much as the paper it's written on. It means nothing. What does it mean? Nothing.

Again, and I go back to the original point, there are no teeth. There's no enforcement in this bill. There's no way, shape or form to this bill that will actually do anything that we hope for. The concerns we heard from Mr. Dhillon and the concerns of Mr. Klees will do nothing to address any of those concerns if we pass this bill.

I'll support the bill. We'll support the bill as New Democrats because even a baby step is better than no step at all. But boy oh boy, when we get to committee, wouldn't we like to see—how many pages in this bill? Six pages. It should be a bill of about 60 pages. It should be a bill that covers the works of artists. It should be a bill that covers the rights to protection of children. It should be a bill that supports those who are not covered by employment insurance or health benefits. It should be a bill to cover part-time labourers in our community colleges, a bill that OPSEU would like to see passed. It should be a bill that brings into place a \$10-an-hour living wage—the poverty line. That's what this bill should do, and that's not what this bill does.

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): I'm happy to support this private member's bill. I thought what I would do is take a few minutes and try and put a human face on just what we're talking about, because we've had statistics and so on and have some theoretical appreciation of what the bill is designed to do.

I'm quoting from an article that appeared in the Toronto Star, Saturday, October 14, 2006, by Rita Daly. I want to read parts of it into the record because I think it puts a human face on this problem and, at the end of the day, we have to remind ourselves that there are human beings, human faces, men and women behind this issue.

I'm quoting from Rita Daly's article:

"To understand the 'temp' industry today is to hear the story of eight Somali women whose experience has left them without jobs, references and, in their estimation, much to fear.

"Five days a week—some for months, others for as long as two years—they clocked into work at the UPS package delivery plant off Jane St. in the north end of the city. Their jobs involved standing for hours high on a platform flipping boxes on a conveyor belt.

"It was mundane work. But worse, it was work that denied them job security, basic employment rights and branded them second-class compared with permanently employed co-workers performing similar tasks on the warehouse floor.

"Considered fringe labour for decades, so-called temps have become the nation's homegrown version of offshore labour. Temporary workers are rapidly replacing permanent workers in almost every sector, often through employment agencies that pay up to 40% less than permanent wages, offer few benefits and make a profit marketing labour to factories, warehouses, retail outlets, nursing homes and offices throughout the country.

"Currently about 13%—or close to 1.7 million—of Canadian workers are temporary, performing contract,

seasonal, casual or agency work. But whereas one in 10 new hires was a temporary worker in 1989, that ratio has now risen to one in five, according to Statistics Canada.

"Temporary agencies have flourished as companies opt to hire cheaper labour from an unregulated industry and under what critics call outdated employment standards legislation. Temp agencies say their biggest challenge is trying to pay workers a decent wage when client companies don't want to"—or won't—"bear the burden of higher costs.

"The Somali women worked 22 hours a week at the United Postal Service plant. But their employer was actually a large North American employment agency called Spherion. In a business arrangement with UPS, Spherion Canada placed temporary workers in the plant and paid their wages.

"The women earned about \$1 an hour less than other unskilled unionized package handlers in the plant. They received no statutory holiday pay. And there was no opportunity for them to benefit from UPS health, dental and pension benefits.

"Last summer, they were abruptly let go, allegedly due to a lack of safety over their traditional Muslim attire while on the job. Up until then, the women say they wore their ankle-length skirts without it being a problem. But after a union drive resulted in the company hiring them on permanently, UPS told them they needed to roll up their skirts for safety reasons, they said in an interview.

"After telling company officials that, because of religious reasons, they could not do so, they were let go.

"Only when the women were being hired on as permanent workers did UPS then start to look at issues of health and safety." That was according to an employee of the Workers' Action Centre, a grassroots advocacy centre that has taken an interest in protecting the rights of temps.

"The women were devastated." They claimed that "neither UPS nor Spherion gave them any health or safety training. And, as other temp workers typically find, they received no termination pay."

I just wanted to highlight that, because that's an example of a vulnerable group that the member opposite's private member's bill is trying to address. I think this Legislature, all of us here, owes a duty to protect these kinds of temp workers. That's what the legislation is designed to do. I'm happy to support it.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I appreciate this opportunity to join in on the private members' business, Bill 161, brought forward by the member from Brampton West-Mississauga. It's An Act respecting employment agencies, which is licensing employment agencies. I've listened to all the comments. We all represent very different ridings and have very different problems within them, and the member from Brampton West-Mississauga has brought this to our attention. He has heard a lot in his riding.

I represent the predominantly rural riding of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, with agriculture being the third-largest employer. As many of you in the room know, it's seasonal, in a sense, as we need more employees within

that—when the sun shines, you have to make hay, as they say. That's when the jobs come. We have within that riding 9,600 full-time jobs connected with the agriculture sector but we have 5,800 part-time and seasonal jobs.

Another large industry in my riding is tourism. In Haliburton county alone, our population goes from 16,000 to 40,000 during that peak tourism time. So we have a lot of fluctuations and need temporary employment for those times of year.

When we listen to the stories of the new immigrants coming to the country, wanting to find employment, and the difficulties and challenges, and the advantage taken of them by some of these agencies, we want to bring in legislation that certainly can give them more protections. So the principle of the bill is very good and I support it, because we've heard the stories, from the newspapers and from members, of the fly-by-night operations that can get involved.

There are certainly some concerns in the bill. I know the member from Parkdale-High Park has brought forward, "Where are the teeth? How are we going to do this?" That's why I think we need to send this through to committee, because we have to hear from these people. It would be a great education for all of us to hear from both the agencies that are set up, that are legitimate, and from the employees who are being taken advantage of.

1140

The bill, as I say, as it currently exists, is another layer of bureaucracy. How can we implement the principle that this bill contains? How can we implement it? Could we simply piggyback it with the Ministry of Labour's already existing employment standards acts? We've talked about professionally run, ethically based agencies that could certainly be considered as best practices. Can we learn from them? Let's not reinvent the wheel. Let's make things better.

There should be more in the legislation to ensure that responsibility for this act does not fall on the backs of municipalities. What roles do they play within that?

Section 3 of the bill mentions items such as the fees, forms required, and prescribed securities for agencies. The bill in sections 13, 14 and 15 further discusses those, but leaves a lot to be determined by the Ministry of Labour at the time.

Like I said, we agree with the bill. We have details that we need to iron out, and that's the purpose of sending this to committee, because we do have to protect vulnerable workers at all levels, and I mentioned the various ridings that we all represent and the examples from each of them. The regulation of the employment agencies needs to be established and balanced with what's required by businesses and industries that use them.

I commend the member for bringing this bill forward: baby steps, as they say. It's a start. As in politics, legislation sometimes doesn't move as fast as we want, and other times it moves too fast for us. But at least this is taking us a step forward. We need to protect the interests of vulnerable people.

We have employment peaks in different areas of our ridings, and there are different countries that come for-

ward—the very real stories that were brought forward today by some of the members and that have been written up in the newspapers.

I think this bill is timely. It is a private member's bill brought forward by a government member, so it's up to the government when this is going to be sent to committee. It's in their hands now, and I support the bill.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): The member from Brampton West–Mississauga has introduced Bill 161 protecting vulnerable workers, the agency act. Mr. Dhillon indicates, in fact, that we're not very good right now at protecting vulnerable workers. He indicates that there are many provinces that are actually doing a better job. The provinces of Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Yukon, and even the Northwest Territories have legislation in place that is doing a better job, and that's why he's identified this as a hole that needs to be filled. He indicates that California, Maryland, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York and other jurisdictions have similar legislation already on the books. We did, but there were changes made, probably as an oversight.

We're right now ready to vote on Bill 161. I'm sure, from what I'm hearing from all parties, that Mr. Dhillon's bill will be successful today. So I want to say to you, congratulations. It's a great step in the right direction. We will support this.

Almost every Saturday, I want you to know, I'm in my constituency office on the corner of Davenport and Dufferin. At 9 o'clock in the morning you'll see me there. I would say that twice a month at least two people come to complain to me about the kinds of issues we're debating today: inadequacies, unfairness, unjust treatment in terms of employment agencies.

One person came in and she said to me, "I just paid what's called a placement fee in order to get a job." A placement fee means that if you want to be considered for employment, you've got to pay ahead before you even get paid. What kind of employment agency asks you for money up front?

I was shocked today to hear an even bigger price from the member from Oak Ridges, who said that there was a tremendous amount of money wanted; he talked about over \$5,000. Now, he said \$4,900, and if you added GST that comes to over \$5,000. Imagine paying over \$5,000 before you can get employment, before you get a first paycheque. This kind of a situation cannot persist. Consequently, we're certainly in favour of filling this hole today with Bill 161.

Another person comes in and he says it to me, "I have to pay what's called a registration fee." That was in the amount of \$120. A registration fee means you have to register before you can get employment and pay money upfront before you can get employment. Wow. I wonder how many of us would pay money upfront before we get a job as an MPP. Wait a minute—

Interjection.

Mr. Ruprecht: I suppose we all paid money upfront. Well, no. The NDP and the Conservatives are getting

paid before they get the job, because they get support from the party, and the Liberals probably don't. I never got any support from my party, but I know that you did and I know that you did. In any case, let's not talk about that.

Another person comes in and she says to me—this is very important—"I was not paid for the last two weeks before this company went bankrupt, and I want to be compensated." There was some talk here earlier saying that the ministry is not doing a good job. I want to tell you, I differ on this analysis. I have a letter here from Minister Peters, who is the Minister of Labour. He says, "Our government is taking a strong, proactive approach to protecting the rights of temporary ... workers. We're committed to ensuring these rights, and believe the most effective way of protecting temporary workers is to enforce our laws...."

Just two quick points: "We've made a big difference"—yes. "We have set and surpassed targets. Between 2003 and 2004, there were only 151 proactive inspections." In 2004 to 2005, guess how many? Our team, he says, "conducted 2,355 proactive inspections"—not bad. "Since 2004, we helped recover \$3.2 million in wages...."

Thank you, Mr. Peters, and congratulations to the member from Brampton West–Mississauga for Bill 161.

Mr. Bisson: I'm going to support this bill, in the sense that it's a step in the right direction. But my problem is, I read the bill and all it really does is say that employment agencies are going to have to have a licence. It doesn't do anything about making sure that the Employment Standards Act is followed. It doesn't do anything about prescribing what the employment agency can and can't do when it comes to how they treat the temporary employees who are getting jobs through their agency. It doesn't deal with anything having to do with the fees that are charged. There is a whole litany of issues that aren't dealt with.

I want to put on the record upfront that we're going to give this bill support at second reading on condition that should it ever actually get to a committee—well, it will get to a committee if it passes this House—that is going to deal with it, we need to take a look at a whole bunch of other issues. I think there are certain practices—not with all, because there are some good employment agencies out there that do good work and treat the people that they work with fairly, but there are a lot of examples where they don't.

The member across the way talked about people having to pay upfront fees when it comes to being able to even get the job, and sometimes those fees are quite heavy. There are others, in most cases, where the employee is not paid directly by the employer they're going to work for but rather by the agency that got them the work. Are there situations where people are having deducted off of their paycheque some sort of administrative fee or whatever it might be, as far as the employment agency basically skimming off the top of the wages money that should actually be going to the employees? You've got to look at all of those issues. To say that this bill is monumental in moving something forward I think is just a bit beyond the pale.

I also want to put on the record—and this is somewhat related—something that came to my attention recently from Mike Aiken from Thunder Bay. If you can allow me to digress a little bit, he wrote of the fine work that the Kinsmen and Kinettes have been doing for years when it comes to dealing with cystic fibrosis. He sent an e-mail in, and I wanted an opportunity somewhere in the debate to raise this.

1150

He pointed out that in 1963 Dr. Crozier, the director of the CF clinic at the Hospital for Sick Children, had gotten together with Bill Skelly, just by a chance meeting at one point. Through that conversation, Bill Skelly, through his particular Kinsmen organization, started championing the issue of cystic fibrosis. As a result, the Kinsmen have gone far and beyond to become the champions of cystic fibrosis. Now, some 40 years later, they've managed to raise \$32 million for that particular cause. I just want to say to them, that is work really well done. As to how it relates to this debate, I would just say that many of the people within organizations such as the Kinsmen and others may know somebody who is actually involved through an employment agency, and I want to make sure that whatever we do with this bill, we end up doing what is right. "

The other point that I want to raise very quickly is that in this particular bill there is really no enforcement mechanism other than an enforcement mechanism to make sure that there is a licence posted and that the operator has a current licence. Well, the licence has no requirements to it. So again I go back and say to the member, Mr. Dhillon, who brings this bill forward, it's great to have a licence, but it's a little bit akin to all of a sudden saying that we're going to issue somebody a driver's licence but at the end of the day there's no requirement as to what the driver needs to know when it comes to training to be able to get that licence in the first place and then having to follow the rules of the road. You don't just issue a licence in isolation of everything else; you've got to make sure that in the end there is some rhyme or reason as to how those organizations have to work and what rules they have to follow.

Employment agencies are becoming more and more a big part of the economy, not only in Ontario, I would argue, but across North America and elsewhere. We need to make sure that workers who work through employment agencies are protected against some of the bad practices that we know occur now. We need to make sure that those who are out there legitimately trying to do the right thing are regulated in some way to make sure that there is confidence in the system, unlike, unfortunately, what we see at times now.

Again, I want to say that we need to make sure that workers are properly protected through this particular bill. We will give this bill support at second reading, with the understanding that when it gets to committee, if it does get to committee and it's dealt with, at the end of the day we need to make some amendments to make sure that there is enforcement, make sure that there are

standards and make sure that we properly set up this bill to do what the member is trying to do.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): First, I want to stand up this morning to congratulate my colleague from Brampton West-Mississauga for bringing such an important issue to this House. Temporary agencies across the province of Ontario have been around for many years, and I know that some of them do an excellent job. But some others don't do any job; as a matter of fact, they mess with the lives of many, many different workers who are badly looking for jobs. They want to work, and they cannot find a job on their own. They go to those agencies, and they give them a job at almost 40% less than what they're supposed to earn in the regular time and regular places. It's a very important bill, a very important issue. We should be supporting it, and we should talk about it many different times.

I was happy to see both opposition parties supporting and talking about this bill. I know every party talks from a different point of view, and they don't think it's going far enough, but as a matter of fact, it's a very important step toward a bigger step. When we go into the details of this bill, we can fill it up and make it strong and able to serve the people of Ontario.

I'm honoured and privileged today, and especially yesterday when we were debating Bill 124, fair access to regulated professions in the province of Ontario, to see the support of the people of Ontario for our bill and how much our government pays attention to the people who come to this province from different parts of the globe, gives them the ability to utilize their skills and their potential, to help us continue building this province of Ontario. This is our approach in this province: to assist everyone who wants to be an Ontarian, female and male, from wherever, to get a good job and fair treatment in this province.

I heard the member for Oak Ridges talking about this bill, and also the member for Parkdale-High Park. She said, "Not strong enough; doesn't mean anything." As a matter of fact, I want to congratulate the Minister of Labour and also his assistants—my colleague here, Mario Racco—for the great job they do on behalf of all of us to make sure of safety and the regular and legal conduct by many employers in the province of Ontario—how they do their business on a daily basis, to make sure fairness and accountability are being applied on any site, in any work in the province of Ontario.

When our government got elected in 2003-04, we appointed more than 150 inspectors to make sure all of the jobs were being inspected and run according to the law and the legal process.

Also, he mentioned a name of the person who went to temporary employment agencies and after a while, he didn't get the job or she didn't get the job, and the agency went bankrupt, and the person who, from the United States—and he wrote to the minister of business and consumer affairs back then and didn't get any answer.

I want to tell the member from across the way that our government invested more than \$3.2 million in lost

income for many people who have been defrauded by temporary agencies across the province of Ontario. This is an important issue for us. We don't take it lightly. It's important because we believe strongly that everyone who wants to work and contribute to this economy should be protected and should be looked after very well.

The member for Brampton West brought this issue before us here today to raise it. Hopefully, this bill will go to second stage and third stage and will be implemented to help the people of Ontario. I think it is important and it fits with our direction as a government that wants to protect anyone who wants to contribute to our economy.

Again, I want to congratulate the member, congratulate our Minister of Labour and congratulate our government, who paid attention to all of the details concerning all of the people of the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Dhillon, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Dhillon: First of all, I want to thank the members for Oak Ridges, Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, Parkdale–High Park, Davenport, Willowdale and London–Fanshawe for their contribution to Bill 161. The member for Parkdale–High Park raised some issues, and I just would want to briefly respond to those. Our ministry has done a lot in terms of hiring inspectors, and the inspections have been going up since we got elected in 2003.

Obviously, just as in a lot of things, there is a lot more work to do. This bill is part of it. This bill is part of improving the conditions that temp workers work in with employment agencies and temporary help agencies. There are a lot of legitimate employment agencies out there, ones we need, ones we need to look to in order to set examples for the other ones that are not so good. So again, I want to thank everybody.

The other point made by the member for Parkdale–High Park was about foreign-trained workers. I just want to mention briefly that we have made record-breaking investments in this area to create a level playing field for the educated new immigrants that come in so they can find jobs in their field, because it is important. These are a large segment of the people who get trapped by these new agencies, because they come into Canada, they need a job to provide for their family and oftentimes they have no choice but to accept a job they might not like or one that doesn't pay them as they should get paid.

So once again, I want to thank everybody for contributing to my bill, and I hope that together we can make further progress.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

RAW MILK

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We'll deal first with ballot item number 65, standing in the name of Mr. Murdoch.

Mr. Murdoch has moved private member's notice of motion number 32. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will call in the members after dealing with the next ballot item.

PROTECTING VULNERABLE WORKERS ACT (EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES), 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LA PROTECTION DES TRAVAILLEURS VULNÉRABLES (AGENCES DE PLACEMENT)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 66, standing in the name of Mr. Dhillon.

Mr. Dhillon has moved second reading of Bill 161. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to refer that to the standing committee on general government.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

We will now call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

RAW MILK

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Murdoch has moved private members' notice of motion number 32. All those in favour, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
Klees, Frank

Martiniuk, Gerry
Murdoch, Bill
Runciman, Robert W.

Wilson, Jim

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne
Bisson, Gilles
Brotan, Laurel C.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Fonseca, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie

Hoy, Pat
Jeffrey, Linda
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
Marsales, Judy
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Miller, Norm
Milloy, John
Mossop, Jennifer F.
Patten, Richard

Peters, Steve
Racco, Mario G.
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Scott, Laurie
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): The ayes are 7; the nays are 35.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1208 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): This has been a terrible and devastating week for over 300 million insulin users worldwide who are alive today because of the work of Sir Frederick Banting. To everyone's shock and dismay, the Ontario Historical Society has shown pure greed by selling to a developer the 100-acre farm where Sir Frederick performed some of his earliest experiments. Because of the inaction of this government, the birthplace of Sir Frederick Banting is on its way to becoming a subdivision. Dalton McGuinty and his Minister of Culture should be ashamed of themselves for failing to preserve the legacy of Dr. Banting.

Everyone except the Liberal government and the Ontario Historical Society has been working hard towards turning the property into a camp for diabetic youth and children, while this government chose to abdicate its responsibility to protect the historical significance of this property. Dalton McGuinty and his government have betrayed the trust of Sir Frederick Banting when they could have, at the stroke of a pen, saved this homestead and been international heroes. But they have failed miserably and let the whole world down.

I've introduced petitions containing tens of thousands of signatures in this House over the past two years and I've tabled a private member's bill that could have saved this homestead. It's time for every one of you in the Liberal caucus to stand up and tell Dalton McGuinty to get off the fence, get to work, and save the Banting homestead before it's too late. The ball is in your court.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Nothing changes, and in fact things are getting worse. That's the best way to describe the ongoing crisis for patients, health care professionals and emergency room staff at the Sudbury Regional Hospital.

Yesterday, at least six surgeries were cancelled because there were no beds available at the hospital for recovering patients. Indeed, the night before, post-operative patients stayed in the recovery room all night because there was no bed for them to go to. In October, 15 surgeries were cancelled. Two weeks ago, two full operating days were lost, with 20 surgeries cancelled, because of the bed shortage. The cancellations yesterday were particularly frustrating for everyone, as two extra hours of operating time had been set aside for hip and knee replacements as per the government's wait time strategy.

The bed shortage at the Sudbury Regional Hospital continues because patients who could be discharged have no community services or beds to go to. Yesterday, there were 92 alternate-level-of-care patients waiting for discharge. This is not new. In fact, this crisis has gone on

for over two and a half years now, and the number of patients waiting in the hospital has grown over that time. Surgery cancellations are becoming more frequent, and backups in the emergency room—19 people on stretchers in the ER by yesterday afternoon—are getting worse too.

When will the McGuinty Liberal government finally deal with this crisis? When will a concentrated effort be made to solve this serious ongoing problem? How many more patients will be stuck in the hospital while surgeries are cancelled and patients are backlogged in the ER before a permanent solution is found?

WATER QUALITY

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): This week I was extremely excited and proud to learn of a partnership between the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning and the region of Peel. In November, I learned that Peel and Sheridan began offering a water and waste water education program for municipal operators who work on waste distribution and waste water collection systems. The development of this program is a proactive response to our government's passage of the Safe Drinking Water Act in December 2002. Justice O'Connor's recommendations will protect human health through the control and regulation of drinking water systems and drinking water testing.

The Peel-Sheridan partnership is the first of its kind in this province and will set a new standard in training for programs in the water industry. This partnership will not only ensure that the region of Peel maintains its high quality of water purification and distribution but also will bear fruit elsewhere because they have held discussions with other municipalities to offer their learning and development programs to employees at their locations.

The signature of a great community is leadership, and I feel it's very important that we acknowledge those in our community who lead by example. I commend and applaud the vision and foresight of all those at the Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning and the region of Peel for creating a program that will set the standard for safe drinking water around this province.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): It's my sad duty to report that once again another mill will be closing permanently. The Tembec mill in Smooth Rock Falls, idled in July, will shut down permanently, leaving more than 280 employees without jobs, this despite the Premier's assurances that his northern energy rebate for large pulp and paper operations is just what the doctor ordered; this despite the Minister of Natural Resources' proclamation that all the recommendations of his forestry sector council have been fulfilled; this despite the minister's assurances that Ontario's forestry sector got off virtually scot-free in relation to the US housing slump. How many more jobs will be lost before the McGuinty government takes action?

This government is only interested in parroting orchestrated quotes from forest companies that fear retaliation from this government. I have a few different quotes, like the executive who told the *Globe and Mail*, "The government's response has been somewhat sporadic...."

"What we don't have is the grand master plan yet.... It's taken a long time to get serious attention for this issue and for people to realize this isn't just a cyclical swing."

Here is another quote, from the Composite Panel Association: "We are ... respectfully voicing our disappointment and astonishment that particleboard and medium-density fibreboard plants were not included in your electricity rebate program...."

"We fail to understand that, given our similarities both in energy consumption, processes and competitiveness, why we are not a full beneficiary of the rebate program."

Time and time again, the McGuinty government shows that it has no plan and no vision.

MURRAY BARKLEY

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): It gives me pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize a great Ontarian, Murray Barkley.

Murray is a third-generation proprietor of Barkley's Store in Avonmore, as well as the author of the recently published book titled *Speaking of Avonmore: History, Heroes, Happenings and Humour in the Life of a (not very) Typical Ontario Village*.

I was honoured to join with others from my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh in the Avonmore community centre for the launch of Murray's book. It is a collection of speeches and articles that affectionately capture the spirit and history of the community of Avonmore. The great character and characters of Avonmore come to life in Murray's words, and readers quickly learn what makes Avonmore such a magical place in which to live.

Murray has not only written a book that captures the essence of Avonmore; he is donating \$5 from the sale of each book sold before Christmas to the fundraising campaign to replace the Avonmore community centre. This is the sort of commitment to communities so prevalent in my riding and so ably embodied by Murray Barkley himself. It was Murray's advocacy back in the 1980s and 1990s that kept the Avonmore post office, Roxmore Public School and the Avonmore Library from closing.

I am proud of the work Murray Barkley has done and of the way he continues to help preserve the essence of his community, while using his words to let people know how special Avonmore is in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): One thing you can say about Dalton McGuinty is that he sure leads by example.

This week, the Auditor General's report cited the wasteful and gluttonous spending of our taxpayer dollars. This week we have witnessed that many government agencies are closely following on the footsteps of Dalton McGuinty and his cabinet minister. This is the Premier who travels with the largest entourage of staffers, hangers-on and wannabes in the history of Ontario. Who can forget when they paid \$800 to ship ice from Toronto down to Niagara and booked more hotel rooms, even more than McGuinty's giant entourage?

This is a Premier who spent \$6 million to drop the "C" from the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., spent \$120,000 to redesign the trillium and gave a \$20-million raise to his Liberal appointees in various government agencies, boards and commissions, let alone all those ministers spending millions of dollars on hotel rooms for meetings when government space in Macdonald Block is sitting empty. No doubt, Dalton McGuinty is leading by example. Easy-money McGuinty is spending your money like it's going out of style. To hear Dalton McGuinty say, "You've got to be careful with tax dollars"—oh, come on. Horse feathers. Dalton McGuinty is simply saying, "Don't do as I say; do as I do." He's the one with the helicopter and he's the one setting the example.

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DANA ROBBINS

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): Today I want to celebrate a Hamilton champion. Dana Robbins was the editor-in-chief for the *Hamilton Spectator* and is leaving our wonderful city to accept a new position as the publisher of the *Record of Waterloo region* and the *Guelph Mercury*.

Dana has received many tributes for his distinguished work and is known as one of Canada's brightest young editors. Hamilton is affectionately called a "large small town" where we feel we all know each other personally. In this instance, Hamiltonians have responded by sending e-mails, letters and gifts to Dana wishing him continued success.

He started his career at the *Hamilton Spectator* as an intern in 1982. He then went on to return as the *Hamilton Spectator's* reporter in 1984 and was named editor-in-chief in the year 2000: 24 years of stellar service to Hamilton.

At a time when newspaper readership was said to be in steady decline, Dana Robbins took the challenge and in October 2003 took a six-section newspaper and changed it into four sections.

Recently, Mr. Robbins was a guest speaker at the 50th anniversary of Mission Services. He spoke elegantly and eloquently about each of our responsibilities to those in need. Michael Josephson wrote a piece entitled, "What Will Matter." One line reads, "Strive to ensure that the outcomes of your actions have benefits that extend well beyond yourself." Dana has achieved that lofty goal, and in 2005 he received the Excellence in Journalism Award, which is known as the most prestigious media honour.

He is also recognized as being emotionally involved with Hamilton's community, and initiated a poverty project.

Please wish Dana Robbins our very best success for the future.

HOLIDAY SEASON

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I rise in this House today to speak about the wonderful holiday season which is fast approaching. As we all know, throughout December and January, Ontarians from many different ethnic and religious backgrounds will be celebrating special holidays with friends and loved ones. London welcomes people from 130 different countries who speak many different languages, and we practise every belief on earth and enjoy peace and tranquillity. That's why we enjoy being Ontarians and Canadians.

I would like to take this time to wish each and every Ontarian across this great province a happy and safe holiday season and all the very best in the new year. Mr. Speaker, I will thank you, and I wish you and I wish all my colleagues in the House from both sides a happy season, and hopefully they'll have a great and safe season.

DOCTORS' SERVICES

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): I rise today to talk about the extraordinary success the McGuinty government is having with regard to our commitment to have more doctors practising in Ontario. Our government took up the challenge that was left behind by the previous two governments and is aggressively addressing this serious lack of health care professionals in the province.

Under the leadership of George Smitherman, we're working tirelessly to ensure that all communities across the province get the access to health care they deserve. Not only is the McGuinty government focused on initiatives that will see new spaces for medical students open up in Ontario—many in my riding—we're also committed to helping foreign-trained health care professionals receive the accreditation they need to practise here. They have the skills, Ontarians have the need and the McGuinty government is making sure the two are put together for the benefit of everyone.

We've been able to go above and beyond projected targets this year by offering 218 new positions for training and assessments of international medical graduates. Ontario communities are seeing 750 new internationally trained medical graduates practising since 2003, and there are another 470 internationally trained medical graduates currently enrolled in training and assessment programs.

Unlike the members opposite, we want to invest in the health care of Ontarians, not strip away valuable resources and funding. We know there's more to do, but we're committed to ensuring—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

REPORT, OFFICE OF THE INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the report of the Integrity Commissioner made pursuant to the MPP Compensation Reform Act, 2001.

MOTIONS

WITHDRAWAL OF BILLS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I have the following motion. I move that the order for second reading of Bill 83, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and the Coroners Act to better protect the children of Ontario, standing in the name of Mr. Jackson, be discharged and the bill be withdrawn; and

That the order referring Bill 96, An Act to amend the Education Act, to the standing committee on regulations and private bills, standing in the name of Ms. Wynne, be discharged and the bill be withdrawn; and

That the order referring Bill 71, An Act to promote the use of automated external heart defibrillators, to the standing committee on social policy, standing in the name of Mr. Crozier, be discharged and the bill be withdrawn.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting times, the standing committee on regulations and private bills be authorized to meet after routine proceedings this afternoon for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 124, An Act to provide for fair registration practices in Ontario's regulated professions.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, His Honour awaits.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the chamber and took his seat upon the throne.

1350

NATIVE YOUTH

Hon. James K. Bartleman (Lieutenant Governor): Pray be seated.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, here assembled, has resolved to receive Your Honour's gracious address.

Hon. Mr. Bartleman: Premier McGuinty, Mr. Tory, Mr. Hampton, members of the Legislative Assembly, I should like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to provide the Legislature with a story of hope before everyone departs for the holiday season.

In addition to their normal constitutional and ceremonial duties, Lieutenant Governors traditionally embrace non-partisan causes that are important to the people of their provinces. In 2002, when I was sworn in, I selected mental health, anti-racism and the welfare of native youth as my priorities. I have been asked to speak to you today on what I have been doing for native youth.

I chose this issue as a result of my own experiences growing up as a member of a mixed white-aboriginal family in the Ontario of the 1940s and early 1950s. During these formative years, I witnessed first-hand the terrible poverty of native people, their lack of political rights and the racism to which they were subjected.

In the years that followed, I watched the condition of native people improve. They received the vote in 1960. A small but well-educated middle class has come into being. It was not, however, until I became Lieutenant Governor and began to travel to northern Ontario, in particular to the 50 communities of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation located in the vast northern two thirds of our province, that I saw how far we still had to go as a society.

Twenty-six of these communities have access to the outside world only by air. Poverty is deep and endemic. Unemployment is over 70%. A container of three bags of milk costs \$13, a carton of juice \$9 and a case of pop \$29.

My first trip was a revelation. As my aircraft landed and taxied down the runway to park, another aircraft waited for clearance to take off. The distraught chief told me that the outgoing aircraft was carrying out to Thunder Bay for an autopsy the body of a 14-year-old girl who had killed herself. "Why?" I asked the chief. "She had no hope," he told me.

Last year, three young people, including a 12-year-old girl who hanged herself on a tree in front of her school just as her classmates arrived to start their day, killed themselves at Wunnumin Lake First Nation. "Why did they do it?" I asked the chief, teachers and parents. "Because they lacked hope," they said.

Why do these children lack hope? They lack hope because they have few job prospects. They lack hope because they often do not know how to read and write. They lack hope because they live in poverty. They lack hope because they see on television the relative wealth of their fellow Canadians that they sense they will never share. They lack hope because they hear stories of racism from their friends and relatives who visit the outside world. They lack hope because they lack self-esteem. They lack hope because they believe that no one cares about them. They thus kill themselves at rates 10 times the national average, out of sight and out of mind of their fellow Ontarians.

Suicide in Canada is actually a phenomenon which affects middle-aged people, but among the native population it is the young people, often children.

I turned to Grand Chief Stan Beardy, who is with us today in the gallery, to seek his advice on what to do. I would ask the Grand Chief to stand.

The Grand Chief told me that we had to give the children hope and to show them that other Ontarians cared about them. Hope and caring, he emphasized, were the keys. We have worked closely together to achieve those objectives ever since.

Our starting point was our conviction that people and organizations of goodwill could make a difference. We found that we had to mobilize civil society. We found that all we had to do was to ask and Ontarians in the thousands were ready to help. And the government of Ontario and the Ontario Trillium Foundation stepped in to assist. We then had a marriage of civil society and government, a potent combination.

The Grand Chief and I agreed that the keys to giving hope were literacy and building bridges of understanding and mutual respect between native and non-native children.

I for one will never forget the impact my encounter with books had on me when I was growing up in Muskoka in the 1940s. They transformed my life, allowed me to dream, and prepared me for a life other than that of an unskilled labourer, which would have otherwise been my fate.

I also never forgot the casual racism of that period. The lesson I learned was how important it was for people, especially children, to respect the cultures of others.

The Grand Chief and I decided to be highly focused and practical and to stay away from the issues of who was to blame, who should feel guilty and who had entitlements.

In 2004, the library shelves were bare in the native schools in the NAN territory. We thus appealed to Ontarians to donate gently used books and hoped to collect 60,000; 1.2 million poured in. The OPP opened its detachments as book collection sites and the Canadian Forces offered a hangar at Downsview for storage. Volunteers sorted them down to 850,000 and, with the help of the Canadian Forces, Wasaya Airways and trucking companies such as Manitoulin Transport, we established libraries in schools not just in the north but in native communities that wanted them across Ontario, plus 26 of the 28 friendship centres of the province. Some time later, when the children of Attawapiskat were tested, their reading levels had gone up by 30% just by having books to read.

In our second initiative, with the support of the chiefs of the province, the Ontario Principals' Council, the Toronto Catholic District School Board and the Toronto District School Board, we twinned 100 native schools with non-native schools in the province and all the schools of Nunavut with schools in Toronto. This was to promote cross-cultural awareness and to break down barriers between kids.

1400

The results have been heart-warming. Just two weeks ago, for example, I hosted a get-together in my suite with the students of the Mary Jane Naveau Memorial School from Mattagami, who had come to Toronto and bunked down with students from the St. Francis De Sales elementary school in North York. The Toronto Catholic District School Board even held arctic games last spring with students from twinned schools in Toronto and Nunavut.

In our third initiative we established summer camps, run by Frontier College, in all fly-in communities in Ontario's north. Nine universities, four colleges, three teachers' federations, De Beers Canada, the Canadian Auto Workers Union, the Power Workers' Union and Ontario's power companies provided the bulk of the funding for the camps to run for five years. The Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and the Ministries of Citizenship, Health Promotion, Children and Youth Services and Training, Colleges and Universities complemented their efforts.

The Canadian Tire Foundation stepped in with baseball gear, and Jan Industries of Montreal donated guitars to give sports and music components. Although not part of the summer camp program, the Toronto Maple Leafs and the NHL Players' Association provided hockey gear to equip 25 teams, in collaboration with the Daniel Beardy Memorial Hockey Fund, to fight violence and suicide. The Grand Chief has told me that the impact of this donation on the troubled youth in his communities has been absolutely enormous, a perfect marriage, therefore, of civil society and government.

Last summer I visited the camps to see how the children were doing. In North Spirit Lake, the principal pulled me aside to point out three youngsters who had just learned to read. The same thing happened to me in my visits to other communities.

Our fourth initiative is a young readers' club called Club Amick, run by the Southern Ontario Library Service. Banks, churches, the Trillium Foundation, but above all hundreds, if not thousands, of individual Ontarians have provided the money to give new children's books and a children's newspaper on a regular basis over the next five years to all 3,500 children, from kindergarten to grade 6, in every one of the fly-in communities. The teachers' federations and individual teachers' chapters and individual teachers have taken a major role in all of this. My dream is that some day the children in other native communities across Ontario's north will be able to become members of Club Amick, so that they too will develop a love of reading.

I am announcing today that I will be launching another province-wide book drive for the month of January. This time, in addition to topping up the libraries we established in 2004, I am hoping to provide surplus books to native communities elsewhere in the Canadian north, including Nunavut. The OPP has generously agreed to make its detachments across the province available as book collection sites once again. I thank Commissioner

Fantino for his support. He's currently stuck in a traffic jam south of Orillia. The Canadian Forces, through the Land Force Central Area, will also make available a hangar once again at Downsview and will help to deliver the books. I thank Colonel Lawrence and Brigadier-General Thibault for their support.

The Governor-General has agreed to be honorary patron, and has indicated that she would like to work with me and the other Lieutenant Governors to introduce these initiatives to other parts of Canada. Alberta is already onside, and the Crees of northern Quebec have come to see me and said that they would like to twin their schools with schools in Ontario.

I would like to thank the press gallery here at Queen's Park and the media everywhere. Members of the print and broadcast media have travelled with the Grand Chief and me extensively. The media's compelling stories and powerful photos have done much to increase awareness of a region and a people who are often overlooked.

Finally, I would like to thank, through you, their elected representatives, the many thousands of Ontarians, for their support. Their acts of caring, generosity and, most importantly, their passion ensure that the native children and their families know that their fellow Ontarians care about them and want them to hope again. What a wonderful good-news story as we begin the holiday season.

Thank you very much for the privilege of being able to address you today.

His Honour was then pleased to retire.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PUBLIC SECTOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is to the Premier. Since last week, we have been raising in this House issues arising out of the Auditor General's report. So much of that report, regrettably, detailed government waste, whether it was half a million dollars in spending on credit cards each and every day for 365 straight days or expenses hidden under the names of other employees or all-inclusive stays at luxury resorts and \$60,000 SUVs. This is in addition to the examples of waste that we have been raising for weeks as part of our waste-busters campaign.

Premier, you have brushed off and you have defended this misuse of taxpayers' dollars, and then yesterday you said you were going to find "the people who are misusing the taxpayers' dollars."

My question to you is, based on the fact that we've already found the people who have misused the taxpayers' dollars, what steps are you going to take to deal with these identified misuse-of-public-money situations at children's aid and at Hydro One?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I don't think it will come as

a surprise for you to learn that I disagree with the characterization of what has unfolded in recent days in Ontario.

I think that Ontarians can, first of all, take heart in the fact that we have changed the law in Ontario to allow the Auditor General to get behind doors that had, in the past, been locked by the previous government. The previous government did not want the Auditor General to take a look at what was happening inside our children's aid societies, OPG, Hydro One, colleges, universities, hospitals and the like. We think it's important for the auditor to have access to those places. Almost half of the taxpayers' money that we spend in Ontario goes into our transfer partners. So we think we've taken an important step.

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The member opposite is right: We do have a responsibility to find a way to address these. We've launched a specific plan to address the challenges we've encountered in our children's aid societies. I know that the Minister of Energy is also contemplating what he is going to do now in his regard.

Mrs. Witmer: We indicated yesterday that we do believe it is important that the Auditor General investigate these agencies. But the information that you have received is only good if the government intends to act on it, and so far, we haven't seen that. We've seen the defence of the misspending. Then, when the temperature got a little high, we've heard you say that we need to find these people. Well, that has already been done. The only thing that has not been done is for you to take action.

So my questions to you are as follows: Have you issued a directive to limit the number of corporate credit cards? Have you issued a directive to tighten the rules of the use of those cards? Have you indicated what disciplinary measures are going to be implemented? Is anybody going to be dismissed?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Of course I categorically and unequivocally reject the member's assertion that somehow we are going to defend the indefensible. We welcome the information that was brought into the light of day and made available to all Ontarians. In terms of what we intend to do—we've done some and there's more to be done; there's no doubt about that. But I'll gladly put our record up against the former Conservative government's record. I'll remind the member opposite what the Auditor General said about the former Conservative government.

The Auditor General said: "It was apparent to us ... that there were far too many areas where prior-year concerns—often going back four, five, six, or even 10 years—had not been satisfactorily addressed.... There is no excuse for a lack of effective action after so many years have passed."

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): How long have you been in office?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: One of the members opposite asks, "How long have you been in office?"

Let's hear what the Auditor General has said about what we've done in office. The Auditor General said: "I

have seen an improvement over the past three years.... Of particular interest is the number of audits where the progress made to date is not only satisfactory but significant—action is being taken on all recommendations, with a number already having been substantially implemented."

We are listening to—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mrs. Witmer: It was this Premier who said that action is eloquence. Well, now is the time for him to make that a reality. So far, we're seeing that these words are totally meaningless. We have a Minister of Energy who said he'd provide the names of advisers; he hasn't done so. We have a Premier who said we'd get a report on how Tom Parkinson got a \$500,000 bonus; it's eight months later, and we have not seen anything.

So I ask you today, why should we believe you when you say you're going to take action? You have been in this office for almost four years. You've broken many promises and many commitments. Why should people believe you today when you say you're going to take action on this report?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I want to repeat what the Auditor General said about our record in government. He said: "I have seen an improvement over the past three years.... Of particular interest is the number of audits where the progress made to date is not only satisfactory but significant—action is being taken on all recommendations, with a number already having been substantially implemented."

I can understand the Conservative Party's impatience, but we are going to move forward thoughtfully and effectively and ensure that all Ontarians, but especially those employed in the broader public sector, understand that we have now in place today in our province a higher standard, to which we must all adhere.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I'm again going to ask the Premier a question. This time, I want to remind you that there are many Ontarians who are waiting for diagnostic tests. They often wait in fear and in pain, and many of them are unable to work. You told Ontarians that they could rely on the information posted on your wait times website. In fact, you boasted about it, and you ran a \$2-million ad campaign that makes claims that we now know are not supported by the facts. The Auditor General this week said that the information on the website is, and I quote him, "misleading" and that it should be "taken with a grain of salt."

My question for the Premier is this. We know that wait times were going to be central to your election campaign. My question for the Premier is, are you now going to correct your data and methodology prior to that, or will you focus your campaign for re-election on data that the Auditor General calls "misleading"?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): First of all, let me say that

we treat everything the Auditor General says very seriously. He has told us that he has some real concerns about the way that information has been presented. Coincidentally, late yesterday afternoon the Minister of Health and I had a meeting with Dr. Alan Hudson. He's the individual who has taken responsibility for the collection and presentation of that data. We're going to ensure that we take the necessary steps to gain the Auditor General's support in terms of how we present that information.

But I will ask the member opposite to take note of the fact that it was the same Auditor General who approved the particular ad in question. That same Auditor General has never said that wait times have not gone down. What he said is that it could be confusing to Ontarians when we deal with this average data that is presented. He has a point, and we will carefully consider the best way to move forward, given his good advice to us.

Mrs. Witmer: Again to the Premier: We have many people in this province who have discovered they can't trust the data on the website. One such individual is Millie Downing. She says that the government—and her experience bears this out—obviously can't be trusted. She's a nurse. She's been unable to work for the last year due to a severe spinal condition. Her specialist ordered a diagnostic scan.

She took your advice and called around looking for the shortest wait time at hospitals in her area. She contacted them in August. Barrie said she'd have to wait until after Christmas—more than four months—even though the website claimed a wait of 95 days. Sudbury told her she'd have to wait two to three months just to get on the waiting list, but your website said she should only wait 81 days to have the MRI completed.

Her experience is proof that your website does need to be taken with a grain of salt. It's misleading. How can anyone have confidence in what your government is saying when their own experiences tell them otherwise?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The website presents data in three ways. Without unduly complicating it, I believe we present median wait times, average wait times and 90th percentile wait times. By any objective measure—and I know the Auditor General would not argue with this—wait times are coming down in the province of Ontario; there's no doubt about that.

I'm also proud to say that Ontario has been a pioneer in this regard. No other Ontario government tried to wrap its arms around this particular cactus before. We're doing it. It does call for pioneering on our part, and that's exactly what we've been doing. We've got some good advice now from the Auditor General. He says there's got to be a better way to present that kind of data. We agree with him, and we're going to find a way to make sure we do that.

I can also say that we have had a 78% increase in the volumes of those procedures—diagnostic tests, surgeries and the like—that we have funded. So again, by any objective measure, wait times in Ontario are coming down.

Mrs. Witmer: The reality is that people in the province, many of whom have gone to the website, don't

believe you. In fact, people are starting to lose confidence in your government, because this is the government that raised taxes when you said you wouldn't, this is the government that privatized health care when you said you wouldn't, and this is the government that said you were going to reduce wait times, but you have now been found out by the auditor, who calls the wait times “misleading.”

People like Ms. Downing and others just want to go back to work. They trusted you. They thought the information on the website was accurate and up to date. I ask you today, are you prepared to acknowledge and apologize to people like Ms. Downing who have been misled?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: What I will undertake to the individual referenced by my colleague, and what I will undertake on behalf of all Ontarians, is that we will continue to work as hard as we can, whether in the collection of this data or the presentation of this data, to ensure that it is absolutely accurate and in keeping with the standards set by the Auditor General, and to do whatever we can to work with our nurses and doctors and hospital administrators and volunteers. We will do whatever we can to continue to get wait times down in the province of Ontario and to ensure that Ontarians have all the confidence they need in their health care system.

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HYDRO ONE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Premier. Premier, hard-working Ontarians who have watched their hydro bills double in the last three years are disgusted with the greed now on display at Hydro One under the McGuinty government. Hydro One chief executive officer Tom Parkinson spent \$45,000 of public money on personal expenses and tried to hide it on his secretary's credit card. Now we find out that these so-called personal expenses include vacation flights to Australia.

Premier, this contempt for basic standards of accountability must end. The question is this: When will the McGuinty government export Mr. Parkinson out of Hydro One?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The leader of the NDP raises good issues. We don't enjoy the luxury of acting recklessly or precipitously and without some constraint. I know that the leader of the NDP recognizes that from his days in government.

There are things that have happened there which are unacceptable, to reduce it to one word. They're unacceptable and not in keeping with the higher standard that we want to set for all Ontarians who have the privilege of working in the broader public sector. So I say to the leader of the NDP that we will take the necessary time—no more time than absolutely necessary, though—to ensure that we carefully consider our options and act in the greater public interest.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, yesterday you said that those who abuse public money will be found out. Well, more

than a year ago, we found out that Mr. Parkinson was using the Hydro One helicopter for personal joyrides. You did nothing. Last year, we found out about Mr. Parkinson's outrageous \$1.6-million pay package, which was bundled rather delicately. You not only did nothing, you concurred with it; in fact, you said, "This is justified."

Well, Premier, Mr. Parkinson has been found out again. The question is, when is the McGuinty government going to stop uttering excuses and platitudes? When are you going to fire Mr. Parkinson and set an example?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): I would reiterate what the Premier said with respect to how we respond to the auditor: The government wants to ensure that we do so in a prudent and timely fashion in the best interest of the ratepayers.

All these matters are serious matters. I'd remind the member opposite that those salary considerations would not be known had it not been for this government shining light on that. The issue of freedom of information would not be known had this government not brought in legislation to allow for that. Finally, the Auditor General himself would not have been in Hydro One looking at these issues. We brought that in.

We welcome the Auditor General's report. As I indicated yesterday, and will stress today, we are responding in both a responsible and timely fashion to all of the recommendations. We take the recommendations very, very seriously.

Mr. Hampton: The Minister of Energy is wrong. You can find, through any securities and exchange filing in the United States, what Mr. Parkinson is paid. That's where much of this information emanated from.

Here is the history of the McGuinty government: You defended Mr. Parkinson's outrageous pay package, you defended his personal joyrides on the Hydro One company helicopter, and now what we hear is, "Well, maybe we might do something" and "Gee, we're concerned." It sounds like more platitudes, more speeches from the McGuinty government, and no action.

Let's be clear. This is the fourth year of the McGuinty government. The McGuinty government is responsible for the culture of contempt and greed that we see over at Hydro One and no one else. The question is this: When will the McGuinty government give Mr. Parkinson the note "You're fired"?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The McGuinty government has restored OPG to profitability. It has seen the repeated increase in Hydro One's credit ratings. It has allowed the Auditor General to go in and do value-for-money audits at both entities. It has accepted the report from the Auditor General. It is reviewing its options with respect to next steps and is doing so in what I would call a prudent and timely fashion. The government will respond in a way that will protect, first and foremost, the integrity of Hydro One in a way that will give consumers confidence that their public utility is well run.

These are never easy choices, but again, we've made tough decisions in the past on these matters and we will

take the decisions necessary to ensure consumer confidence in their public utilities.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Premier: While Mr. Parkinson spends literally tens of thousands of dollars on personal perks, over 136,000 Ontario women and men have lost their manufacturing jobs; just this past November, 4,000 manufacturing jobs destroyed. Now, the sky-high electricity rates are one of the contributing factors to this loss of jobs, electricity rates that help to subsidize Mr. Parkinson's lavish lifestyle.

My question is this: Why does the McGuinty government pander to Mr. Parkinson's greed while doing next to nothing in terms of reducing hydro rates and helping communities that are losing thousands and tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I would remind the House that this government has brought on 3,000 megawatts of new electricity. I would remind the House that this government has restored OPG to profitability, paid \$1.1 billion down on the stranded debt. I would remind the House again and again and again that the spot market price of electricity is now lower than when we took office.

We acknowledge the challenge that is faced by industries and those who have found themselves out of work for a variety of reasons, not necessarily related to the price of electricity, and we will continue to work with those communities—witness the \$1-billion investment in the forestry sector; witness the automotive investment strategy that this government has undertaken. These are challenging tests.

What you can't do is pretend that you can continue to shelter—which the leader pretends, that there's no cost to the price of electricity. Ontarians understand that—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: What Ontarians understand is that the McGuinty government has been defending this person's greed, defending this person's outrageous pay package and defending this person's misuse of public money. Meanwhile, thousands of workers across Ontario are losing their jobs, particularly in the forest sector, because hydro rates have escalated so quickly that they cannot afford to continue to work in Ontario. They're moving their investment and their jobs to other provinces.

You know, Mr. Parkinson spends more on vacations and renovations—more public money on vacations and renovations—than most of the workers will get in a year, and you've been defending that. So I ask again: Why has the McGuinty government, year after year now, defended the greed of Mr. Parkinson while hundreds of thousands of manufacturing workers and forest sector workers have lost their jobs as a result of sky-high electricity rates?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government has invested in the forestry sector. It has invested in the automotive sector, recognizing the challenges. What the McGuinty

government has seen on its watch is an increase in net new jobs in this province.

We acknowledge the challenges faced in those industries. We particularly acknowledge the challenges faced by families that cope with unemployment. We want to continue to work for them. I will remind you that just this year we provided \$100 million to low-income families for electricity price relief to help them cope with the challenge. I'd remind the member opposite that he voted against that package.

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It is simply not accurate to pretend that you can lower prices the way the member opposite suggests you can. The sooner we come to terms with that reality, the sooner we respond in the way this government has to the forestry sector, the manufacturing sector, the sooner we'll be able to get them out of the current difficulties they're experiencing resultant from a variety of factors, including the value of the Canadian dollar.

Mr. Hampton: I'm shocked. This is the McGuinty government that promised they were going to freeze hydro rates for over three years. This is the McGuinty government that says they've invested millions in the forest sector and the forest sector has turned the corner. Tell that to the workers in Smooth Rock Falls, who were told that their layoff notice this week is permanent, a shutdown, termination. Tell that to the 800 workers at the Freightliner plant in St. Thomas. Tell that to the 700 jobs lost at Navistar in Chatham. There have been 136,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs destroyed under the McGuinty government while you defend the kind of greed that Mr. Parkinson has exemplified at Hydro One. The very workers who are laid off have been subsidizing his lavish lifestyle under the McGuinty government.

My question is simply this: Premier, when will you give Mr. Parkinson—the Mr. Parkinson you've been defending now for two and a half years—the pink slip and set an example?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: As long as one family in this province experiences unemployment, as long as one child is not eating well, not being properly educated, this government will not rest.

I would remind the member that there's a net increase in new jobs in this province since we took office. Understanding the enormous challenge faced by the manufacturing sector and the forestry sector: \$1 billion in investment in the forestry sector; \$500 million, which has leveraged almost \$7 billion in the automotive sector. Those are investments in people that will serve the people of this province well into the future in terms of new job opportunities as we deal with these difficult circumstances.

There are no easy answers to the price of electricity. We have dealt with them in an open and transparent way, just as we've dealt with the situations at OPG and Hydro One. This government will respond in an appropriate and timely fashion to the Auditor General's recommendation and will do so in a way that protects the interests of all Ontario consumers.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I notice she's stepped out.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Get somebody else to ask another question.

Ms. MacLeod: No. We'll wait for her, if you could get her. We've been waiting all week for an answer and we'll get one now, hopefully.

Yesterday, the minister refused to inform this House of who is responsible for her department, who was held responsible for the excessive mismanagement of tax dollars at children's aid societies and who, if anyone, in her department was fired for grossly mishandling tax dollars meant for kids at risk.

Instead, she has professed to have an accountability office in place by January and thinks that's enough. Ironically, this is the same minister who lowered accountability standards in her department. She cancelled financial reviews, ignored quarterly reports and of course abandoned risk assessments.

The auditor outlined three specific mechanisms by which the minister should have been made aware. She missed all three.

Children at risk in this province deserve better. Why should we believe that the minister will start taking her job seriously now, after displaying such gross incompetence in her department?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'm happy to speak about what my ministry is doing.

First, I should say that I am very, very proud to be a member of a government that has the courage to look to see what's happening in the broader public sector in transfer payment agencies that we fund to care for our children.

We are, for example, accepting and implementing all of the recommendations of the auditor. In fact, some of them have already been done. In addition to the recommendations, we are creating a new accountability office that will monitor whether children's aid societies are meeting their legislated requirements for the care and protection of children and ensure that corrective action is taken as needed; assess and report on agency performance; and provide my ministry staff with the training and tools they need to provide better oversight and create a new culture of continuous improvement for CASs. We are also requiring children's aid societies to meet higher standards, as non-discretionary as those of the Ontario public service, for their own employees and programs in such areas as—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. MacLeod: That's what I call beggar's remorse. She can continue to pass the buck and play down her responsibility in the mess before the auditor's report was tabled, but she still has a lot to answer for. The Auditor

General said that while trips were being taken, kids were not being looked after.

The children's aid society disputes what the Auditor General said. Today, CBC is reporting that Carolyn Buck, the executive director of Toronto's children's aid society, says that the Auditor General's report is misleading. To quote the story, "Buck said the Auditor General erred most when he alleged that many children were not getting proper care." This is after we learned that in one third of the cases, the children who needed to be helped the most were being seen an average of three weeks late if they were seen at all.

In light of this, I have to ask the minister: Does she agree with the Auditor General or does she agree with the children's aid society?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I am pleased and proud to be a member of a government that has the courage to have the Auditor General look at what's happening in our agencies. We are implementing every single recommendation of the Auditor General and more.

But let me speak about some of the responses to the Auditor General's recommendations. They're tightening controls on travel reimbursement policies—and this is what the four CASs have already been directed to do by my ministry and are already moving forward on—to ensure detailed and accurate receipts accompany all reimbursement claims; reporting back to their boards of directors to track improvements in areas identified by the auditor; introducing new policies and reporting requirements for overtime, after-hours, on-call service and mileage claims, which have already resulted in savings that are being redirected to front-line services; reviewing staffing structure in the context of the intake process to ensure adequate resources are available to respond to referrals in order to ensure children at risk are seen with—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): To the Minister of Labour: The Brock Smith report of November 2003 recommends that Ontario expand workers' compensation coverage to the 1.3 million workers who are currently excluded. Minister, you buried that report and refused my request for a copy, but I did manage to obtain one through the FOI process. Thirty-five per cent of Ontario's workforce has no workers' compensation coverage whatsoever. Minister, why have you ignored this important report for more than three years?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): The honourable member writes a letter on October 4, 2006, and then files an FOI on October 6, 2006—so give us a break.

I think a bit of a history lesson is important. The Brock Smith report began with consultations in the spring of 2002. That report was completed in 2003. It was made available to the previous Minister of Labour and to myself as the Minister of Labour. I had the opportunity to

review that report in September 2005. I would say to the honourable member that we demonstrated that no, we're not considering universal coverage at this time, but in the spring of last year, we embarked on a process to look at mandatory coverage within the construction sector where the underground economy is most prevalent. Those discussions are ongoing—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. Horwath: Minister, Maryam Nazemi is here today in the gallery. She was with me in the press studio earlier today. She severely hurt herself at work as a Montessori schoolteacher but she could not claim compensation for the injury.

There are 1.3 million workers in workplaces like private schools, nursing homes, banks and insurance companies who can't make a WSIB claim if they are injured on the job. Many of them, like Maryam, end up relying on food banks, with no job, no income and no help from the McGuinty government.

Minister, when that report recommends as its primary recommendation that you expand workers' compensation to every single worker in this province—to the 1.5 million workers, 35% of Ontario workers who are not covered by WSIB—what is your excuse for not expanding that coverage?

1440

Hon. Mr. Peters: I repeat that we are not considering universal coverage at this time.

It never ceases to amaze me how the NDP thinks they have a monopoly on the concerns of vulnerable workers in this province. It's the NDP that created the Friedland formula, which undermined benefits for injured workers in 1994.

We moved forward with an independent audit of the WSIB. That independent audit brought forth the 64 recommendations. All but two of those recommendations have been implemented. We're working hard to get the financial affairs of the WSIB in order. We're working hard to make sure we hold the line on premiums within the WSIB. As well, we have separated the positions of CEO, president and chair, and have appointed an independent chair who has been out consulting with injured workers, employers and business groups across this province.

We believe that, in order to move forward, to help improve benefits for injured workers and help protect businesses in this province, we have to start on a firm financial footing. That's what we are going to do.

EDUCATION

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): My question is to the Minister of Education. I want to thank you for coming to my riding of Chatham-Kent Essex last month to meet with parents in Chatham. I know the parents were very appreciative that you came to listen to their concerns. They know that the McGuinty government is a

government that listens, and we want to encourage all parents to have a strong voice.

Gayle Stucke, director of education of Lambton Kent District School Board, was also in attendance and said it was an honour to have you in the area. Paul Wubben, director of St. Clair Catholic District School Board, was also grateful, and encouraged those parents to attend. If we want to measure how we are doing in education, all we have to do is speak with those parents.

Although they acknowledge that our investments are going a long way to boost student achievement, they did raise concerns about rural funding and transportation in our communities. Would you please inform my constituents what progress the McGuinty government is making in addressing these issues?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): Thank you to the member for Chatham–Kent Essex for the question. It was a great pleasure to meet with his parents—

Interjection.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: —the parents in his community, and it's a great pleasure to be able to go on a Saturday, when parents can actually attend meetings. As a parent myself, I know how important it is for parents to be involved in their kids' education.

There are three things we're doing that I want to talk about, in terms of rural issues. First, we have continued to invest in rural and declining enrolment, because declining enrolment is one of the issues facing small schools in our rural communities: \$125 million this year alone in rural funding. The Lambton Kent District School Board has received \$3 million since 2003, and the St. Clair Catholic board received \$2 million since 2003 for declining enrolment.

The second issue is school closures. We've recently put out school accommodation guidelines which ask boards to look at the value of a school to the whole community before they consider closing that school, and that's very important in small communities.

The third thing is that we are reviewing the transportation funding formula. Lambton Kent and St. Clair Catholic have been leaders. They are in a consortium, and they are demonstrating how we can find efficiencies in the transportation formula. We continue to review that.

Mr. Hoy: Minister, you've taken an active role in making sure that parents across the province understand they have a significant role to play in ensuring that their children have the best education possible. Working together with parents, teachers and our educational partners is essential for us if we are going to achieve results in education.

After years of demoralization of our education system by the previous government, we've made a commitment to improve education and improve the public's confidence in our publicly funded system. Minister, how has the McGuinty government tried to encourage parental engagement in this province?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: One of the things I'm proudest of that we have done in a very concrete way to engage

parents—there's been lip service paid to parent engagement for years, but we've actually invested in parent engagement. As a result of the Parent Voice in Education project, in December 2005 we announced a policy, we set up a parent engagement office and we have invested \$5 million annually in actually getting parents involved. So there's \$5,000 per school board and 17 cents per student that is going to our system so that parents can connect with each other and engage in projects locally. We've given \$500 per school across the province for parents to be able to run their affairs.

We've also set up two funds: \$1 million available to school councils for parent engagement projects, and \$750,000 in Parents Reaching Out grants so that parents can apply and develop projects regionally and provincially that will actually get at what the needs are, to help parents who wouldn't normally be involved to become involved in the lives of their children at school.

These are very concrete things that we've done, and they're already showing results in the regional parent groups that are being set up around the province in all of our boards. I think we should be very proud of our ability to get parents involved in the system.

HYDRO ONE

Mr. John Yakubuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, you promised to disclose to us the justification for the \$500,000 bonus paid to the CEO of Hydro One. You promised to reveal the names of your coal shutdown advisers. Now you are promising to look into the concerns surrounding why the CEO of Hydro One would spend over \$50,000 using his secretary's credit card, thereby avoiding the scrutiny of the board and in essence approving his own expenses.

You are telling us that you are going to look into it, but nobody in this province, based on your record, believes a single word that you say about anything, let alone this. We need specific answers as to what specific steps you are going to take to bring the CEO of Hydro One on the carpet and get specific answers on that issue.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): As the Premier indicated earlier and I indicated earlier, and I will reiterate to the House today, we take the Auditor General's recommendations very seriously. We are responding to those recommendations in what I would call a very responsible and timely fashion, not just with the issues around the expenses the member referenced, but there were a variety of other recommendations that the auditor brought to our attention that require work on the part of the board of Hydro One itself. So we will be responding in what I would again characterize as a responsible and timely fashion, as we have in the past.

This government takes these issues very seriously. This government believes in transparency. That's why we gave the Auditor General the ability to look at organizations like Hydro One and OPG, and this government will be acting on the recommendations of the Auditor General.

Mr. Yakabuski: Minister, of course we got no answer on that. Perhaps we can ask you this question: Mr. Parkinson's appointment to the board of directors of Hydro One expires on December 30. Have you already indicated that you are going to reappoint Mr. Parkinson? If not, are you planning to reappoint him to the board after December 30, 2006? Will you tell us that now, Minister?

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Didn't the Tories appoint him in the first place?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Yes. I would remind the member that it was your government that appointed him and signed his original contract, so I would be careful going down that path right today.

I can assure you that the government is dealing with the recommendations of the auditor in what I would call a responsible and timely fashion. The issues raised by the auditor go well beyond those that the member has raised, to a range of issues. We welcome the Auditor General's advice. We are responding in what I would term a responsible and timely fashion in order to give consumers the opportunity to have confidence in their public utilities.

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): My question is for the Premier. With the ink barely dry on your government's so-called Clean Water Act, your cabinet has thrown environmental protection to the winds with the rubber-stamping of the Dufferin Aggregates Milton quarry expansion. It's one of the most serious environmental crimes against source water and environmental protection in this province in decades.

The Niagara Escarpment is the backbone of the greenbelt. It's an internationally recognized UNESCO world biosphere reserve. Why is your government putting it on the chopping block?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I tell you that we are a government that has proudly taken steps to protect our natural environment, our air, our land and our water for the benefit of all Ontarians today and for future generations.

I would remind my friends across the House that we have taken steps to protect the greenbelt—1.8 million acres of land. The Clean Water Act—historic legislation to protect our sources of drinking water in the province for this generation and the next. You voted against that act, which you proclaim today, as we do, a historic piece of legislation. It's precautionary in nature, ensuring that we protect our sources of drinking water, with historic changes to the "You spill, you pay" legislation—changes which you did not support.

Mr. Tabuns: There are times when you can see the minister is reading too many of her own press releases. She should be paying attention to what others are saying: "McGuinty Trashes The Greenbelt." That's the joint release today by the Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment and Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources, POWER, the two groups that appealed this quarry expansion to cabinet. And the Greenbelt Alliance states, "The people of Milton, Halton Hills and all of Ontario need to know that the greenbelt is under attack and that cabinet lacks the resolve to follow its own legislation"—not a new story.

So Minister, why is your government bent on turning the greenbelt into a gravel belt?

Hon. Ms. Broten: I can tell my friends in this House and Ontarians near this community in Dufferin that cabinet carefully considered a very complex application—an application that had been heard by experts at the Environmental Review Tribunal and the Ontario Municipal Board, with experts before them for more than 11 months. A public hearing was pursued, and cabinet took many months to examine this most serious and complex issue. In reaching our determination, we concluded that the decision of the Environmental Review Tribunal and the Ontario Municipal Board was one that protected the public interest and protected the environment. At the same time, the decision of cabinet was done to strengthen that very decision-making process that had examined those critical factors for more than 11 months. We protected endangered species, we protected the wetlands, and we will ensure going forward, under the conservation role of the local conservation group, that the land is protected, that the wetland is protected, and that endangered species in and around that aggregate, which has been there for many, many years, will be protected.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a question today for the Minister of Finance. My community of Oakville is doing quite well economically, but I know that some areas of the province have been particularly hard hit in the last year with job losses. It's one of the hardest things as a representative when I hear from someone who has lost their job, has a family to support and is facing the holidays.

Minister, you yourself have said in this House that the Ontario economy is facing a period of more moderate growth. Specifically, what is this government doing to help individuals who have lost their jobs, and what are you doing for the province as a whole as we move through this period of more moderate growth?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I appreciate the question from my friend from Oakville. It gives me an opportunity to reiterate firstly that wherever it is in the province, when there's a plant closing and when there's job loss, we all feel that pain. Indeed, in the economic stimulus package that was announced in the fall eco-

conomic statement, one of the top priorities was to give the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities additional resources for early intervention. One of the things that we're doing is providing the resources to intervene early to help with job retraining, to help with relocation, to help apprentices complete their apprenticeship even if the job they're in is no longer available. I'm very proud of that initiative.

We are also doing a number of things in the area of infrastructure, moving up infrastructure projects so that that provides work in communities, communities that are most hard hit with this slight downturn in the economy.

Mr. Flynn: Not only you, but other ministers as well often talk about the steps this government is taking and the significant investments we've made to strengthen this province's economic prosperity. But in regard to this economic stimulus package that you're proposing, I have some specific questions that I know Ontarians are eager to have answered. Can you tell us how the measures you've announced today will build on your economic plan? How will you be choosing the projects and the initiatives? More specifically, are there any areas of the province that won't benefit directly from the initiatives you've just told us about?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I just want to make two points in response. First of all, my friend will recall that we announced in the fall economic statement strengthening the initiatives between Ontario and Alberta because of the industrial demand there and the industrial capacity here. If you talk to our friend the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, she will tell you that there has been great progress already in linking up job opportunities and industrial demand.

On the infrastructure matter, we've made the difficult decision of not approving projects in the greater Toronto area, in the area of Kitchener-Waterloo and in the area of Ottawa, and we've done that because these resources are very important and they're going to communities most in need. We're proud of that very difficult decision.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Interestingly enough, almost a year to the day of the passing of our party's motion in this Legislature calling for a comprehensive jobs plan, the Minister of Finance puts out a news release with a bunch of fluff about what they might do to address the downturn in our economy. This government is finally acknowledging that their policies have put Ontario in last place among the provinces of Canada. Our economy has been showing signs of weakness for over two years now, yet this government waits until the eve of an election year to put something forward, proving yet again that this government will do anything to get re-elected. Meanwhile, the list of job losses continues to grow: Stanley Tools in Smiths Falls—64 jobs gone; Freightliner, St. Thomas—800 jobs gone; Navistar, Chatham—700 jobs gone; Siegwark, Prescott—32 jobs gone; Alcoa, Colling-

wood—330 jobs gone; and Tembec in Smooth Rock Falls—280 jobs gone.

Minister, when are you going to stop saying anything to get elected and actually get down to the business of strengthening Ontario's employment and the opportunity for investment in this province?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): It's a great question. My friend talks about a comprehensive job plan. Talk to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade about the auto strategy, which represents \$7 billion in investment and thousands and thousands of jobs in the auto sector. Have him talk about the investment that we made a year and a half ago in Stelco: \$150 million, and an entire facility in Hamilton saved from closure. Talk to my friend the Minister of Natural Resources about a \$1-billion job strategy in the forestry sector. Talk to my friend the Minister of Colleges and Universities about the \$6.2 billion that we have invested in our post-secondary sector so that this economy can have the trained people it needs to continue to grow. That's a strategy for jobs.

Mr. Chudleigh: Minister, why should we believe you? You talk about the auto sector, and the auto parts sector has been cut in half. They're falling like flies. The manufacturing sector in this province is failing. It lost yet another 4,400 jobs last month, bringing the total to over 136,000 lost jobs under your term. Minister, your record in this sector is dismal, to say the least.

You talk about how 270,000 jobs have been created under your watch. Let's look at that: 123,000 of those were created in the public sector, leaving 147,000 jobs created by the private sector under your watch. That is half the number, almost half the number, that were created in the first three years of the previous government.

Minister, I ask you again, when are you going to stop saying anything to get re-elected and implement a real, comprehensive plan for jobs in this economy?

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Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend talks about jobs being created in the broader public sector. You can be absolutely sure, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I need to be able to hear the Minister of Finance answer the question. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend somehow criticizes jobs that have been created in the broader public sector. I understand that. Their government was about firing nurses. Their government was about going to war with teachers. Their government was about firing water inspectors. They did not believe in strong public services. I will not apologize for having reached a new level of working relationship with tens of thousands of teachers around the province, with doctors, with nurses. I think that is right at the centre of the record of this government, and we are very, very proud of it.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is to the Premier. The McGuinty government has cut funding to the fetal alcohol syndrome disorder clinic in northwestern Ontario. This is a terrible blow to vulnerable children, most of whom are aboriginal children.

When I raised this issue with the Minister of Health, this is what he said: "It should be noted that upon project termination, patients were provided with a letter referring them to the most appropriate provider for their respective health needs (St. Michael's Hospital, Hospital for Sick Children)—in Toronto—"or the Clinic for Alcohol and Drug Exposed Children in Winnipeg)."

Premier, sending these vulnerable kids from northwestern Ontario to Toronto for treatment is a 3,700-kilometre round trip. It would cost more than adequate funding for the clinic. Sending them to Winnipeg would mean doing time, a long time, on a waiting list.

My question is this: Will the McGuinty government do the right thing and fund the fetal alcohol syndrome disorder clinic for children in northwestern Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): Whereas the question was addressed to my colleague, I would like to actually speak about what my ministry, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, is doing to expand services, mental health type services, for children such as the ones the member has referenced in his question.

We know that children in rural and remote areas would benefit from improved access to mental health services. That's why I was very, very pleased recently to announce an expansion of the telepsychiatry program funded through the Hospital for Sick Children but delivered through several communities throughout the province. As a result of that expansion, more than double the number of children receiving telepsychiatry services will benefit from that new investment.

Mr. Hampton: What the McGuinty government holds out here will not help these children at all. The Minister of Health said, if you need these services, put these kids on a bus and ship them 1,800 kilometres to Toronto and back, or send them to Winnipeg, where there is already a waiting list of children from Manitoba who need these services.

Premier, this clinic did some excellent work, some absolutely first-rate work in terms of kids who are suffering as a result of nothing they have done but as a result of many social issues. I'm simply asking: Will the McGuinty government do the right thing? Instead of paying the cost of sending these kids to Toronto or having them languish on a waiting list in Winnipeg, will you provide adequate funding for this clinic?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: In 2004-05, administration of the aboriginal fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and child

nutrition program was transferred to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. This program provides \$4.4 million in funding for health promotion, prevention, education, and family support services related to fetal alcohol syndrome effects and child nutrition through service contracts with 19 aboriginal service providers and First Nations. Funding for this program has been renewed for an additional five-year term, effective April 1, 2006.

INJURED WORKERS

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): My question is for the Minister of Labour. Today, injured workers in our province are holding a day of action to protest what they see is a lack of action in dealing with their concerns. I know that, earlier today, the minister spoke to a group of injured workers assembled in front of the office on University Avenue. I know that the minister has never shied away from meeting with injured workers. He has met injured workers in my riding, and I thank him for that. So I have no doubt that you take these concerns seriously; however, Minister, these days of action sadly are still necessary because they don't feel that they're getting enough action out of our government yet.

Our colleague Mike Gravelle has introduced a private member's bill on the indexation of injured workers' benefits. You and I have discussed other issues like deeming and the 72-month lock-in. I've spoken to many injured workers in my riding. I've worked with them and I've listened to the tragic stories of their broken bodies, their broken spirits, and I need to have some indication from you to help them, because they're starting to lose faith. I know you're working with the WSIB, but we need to show them our interest.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I want to thank the member from Stoney Creek for her strong advocacy on behalf of injured workers. I think it's important to note that there are members on all sides of this House who are concerned about the plight of injured workers.

We recognize that the issues facing the WSIB and the plight of injured workers are not new, but they are complex. After five years of NDP chaos and nine years of Tory neglect, it is our government that's taking action to create a brighter future for injured workers.

A financially stable WSIB is not just in our best interests but is essential for the survival of that very institution. We embarked on a comprehensive audit. We've moved forward with the hiring of an independent chair. We have taken action, and we're going to continue to take action.

I want to thank the member for her advocacy. I want to thank the members from the injured worker community who stood in the cold today at 400 University Avenue to have the opportunity to speak to Chairman Mahoney, who presented me with options. Those options are being considered as to how we can go forward and improve benefits for injured workers and take away the

severe damage that was done to injured workers' benefits by the NDP and the Tory governments. We're going to get it right—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

PETITIONS

LAND TITLES

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

“Whereas, in the current environment of an escalating problem of title theft and mortgage fraud, proper protections for homeowners are warranted and real measures are necessary to address real estate fraud; and

“Whereas MPP Joe Tascona’s Restore the Deed Act, Bill 136, has passed second reading in the Legislature and has been referred to the standing committee on general government; and

“Whereas, among others, the Restore the Deed Act has four primary benefits:

“—Reduce the harm by ensuring that the person who is the rightful owner of the property keeps the property. The innocent buyer or the innocent lender must seek compensation from the land titles assurance fund, as is New Brunswick law;

“—Prevent the fraud by restricting access to registration of documents to licensed real estate professionals who carry liability insurance, by requiring notification statements and the freezing of the register, as is Saskatchewan law, and by establishing a system of ‘no dealings’ where landowners can mark their title, which can only be removed by them using a personal identification number prior to the property being transferred or mortgaged;

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“—Access to the land titles assurance fund be reformed as a ‘fund of first resort’ and be operated by an arm’s-length board of directors appointed by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, composed of a broad representation of consumer, real estate industry and law enforcement groups;

“—Victims of fraud prior to the enactment of the Restore the Deed Act will be eligible to apply for compensation under the reformed land titles assurance fund; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government’s proposed legislation will not get the job done;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to enact the measures to protect homeowners from having their homes stolen, as contained in MPP Joe Tascona’s Restore the Deed Act.”

I support the bill, and the Liberals still have done nothing on this.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

“Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

“Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people’s complaints about children’s aid societies’ decisions; and

“Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman’s office;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province’s children’s aid societies.”

I agree with this petition. I have signed it and I send it down to the table by virtue of page Or.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): I want to thank Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services of Mississauga for this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

“Whereas action by Ontario’s trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario’s trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario’s regulated professions and trades to

review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

I agree with this petition and I will sign it accordingly.

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have more petitions arriving daily to do with the Mary Lake dam in Port Sydney.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition.

GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): I have a petition signed by a number of members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premiers of Ontario have made enormous contributions over the years in shaping the Ontario of today; and

"Whereas, as a result, the final resting places of the 18 deceased Premiers are among the most historically significant sites in the province, but have yet to be officially recognized; and

"Whereas, were these gravesites to be properly maintained and marked with an historical plaque and a flag of Ontario, these locations would be a source of pride to the communities where these former Premiers lie buried, and provide potential points of interest for visitors;

"Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Enact Bill 25, an Act that will preserve the gravesites of the former Premiers of Ontario."

I support this petition and affix my signature.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): "Whereas Longfields and Davidson Heights in south Nepean are some of the fastest-growing communities in Ottawa and Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board has voted to authorize the final design phases for a grade 7 to 12 school to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario has lifted a three-year moratorium on school closings in order to make way for new educational facilities;

"We, residents of Nepean–Carleton, petition the Parliament of Ontario to ensure that the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board continues with plans to build a new grade 7 to 12 school no later than autumn of 2008 to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities."

I went door to door for these petition names myself. I'm so very happy to sign my name, affix my signature and support the petition.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

I am pleased to affix my name.

HIGHWAY 35

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): "Highway 35 Four-Laning

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas modern highways are economic lifelines to communities across Ontario and crucial to the growth of Ontario's economy; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been planning the expansion of Highway 35, and that expansion has been put on hold by the McGuinty government; and

"Whereas Highway 35 provides an important economic link in the overall transportation system—carrying

commuter, commercial and high tourist volumes to and from the Kawartha Lakes area and Haliburton; and

"Whereas the final round of public consultation has just been rescheduled;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government move swiftly to complete the four-laning of Highway 35 after the completion of the final public consultation."

Signed by many members from my chambers of commerce. I affix my signature.

GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I have another petition here signed by some members of the Cornwall Township Historical Society in my riding. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premiers of Ontario have made enormous contributions over the years in shaping the Ontario of today; and

"Whereas, as a result, the final resting places of the 18 deceased Premiers are among the most historically significant sites in the province, but have yet to be officially recognized; and

"Whereas, were these gravesites to be properly maintained and marked with an historical plaque and a flag of Ontario, these locations would be a source of pride to the communities where these former Premiers lie buried, and provide potential points of interest for visitors;

"Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Enact Bill 25, an Act that will preserve the gravesites of the former Premiers of Ontario."

Since I agree with this petition, I shall affix my signature.

NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition to do with cutbacks in the Ministry of Natural Resources. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources ... plays a vital role in the protection and management of the natural resources that belong to all Ontarians; and

"Whereas MNR's budget for 2006-07 is 24% less, in real terms, than it was in 1992-93; and

"Whereas vital programs relating to fish and wildlife, provincial parks, forestry, and other MNR activities continue to be cut back; and

"Whereas the aesthetic, economic, educational, environmental, recreational, and social value of our natural resources far exceeds the cost of protecting and managing them;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That funding of the Ministry of Natural Resources be increased to a level that will enable it to stop cutting existing programs and provide full funding to all existing programs as well as any new programs that may be required to ensure the effective protection and management of Ontario's natural resources."

I affix my signature to this petition.

1520

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): I have a petition that has been supplied by the Peel Multicultural Council of Meadowvale, I believe. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

I concur with the petitioners, and I will affix my signature to it.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have more petitions coming in to do with Hydro One and line work.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Hydro One Networks Inc. provides hydro to many communities in the region of Parry Sound-Muskoka; and

"Whereas there have recently been several lengthy power outages in this region affecting both private residences, schools and businesses; and

"Whereas rural customers pay among the highest distribution and delivery charges for electricity;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Energy Board require Hydro One Networks Inc. to make improvements in line maintenance and forestry management in the region of Parry Sound-Muskoka to ensure reliable energy for its customers."

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Further petitions? Seeing none—oh, the Chair recognizes the member for Nepean-Carleton.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): I appreciate your taking the time to recognize me.

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFOW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

This comes to me by way of the Canadian Federation of University Women Ontario Council throughout the eastern Ontario region, and I affix my signature.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I'd like to rise, pursuant to standing 55, and give the Legislature the business of the House for next week.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): My favourite part of the week.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: This is my favourite part of the day, I've got to tell you.

On Monday, December 11, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act; in the evening, third reading of Bill 52, the Education Amendment Act (Learning to Age 18).

On Tuesday, December 12, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act; in the evening, third reading of Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act.

On Wednesday, December 13, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 130, the Municipal Statute Law Amendment Act.

On Thursday, December 14, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 130, the Municipal Statute Law Amendment Act, and second reading of Bill 155, the Electoral System Referendum Act.

I'm going to ask page Allan to come on over here and hand this to the table. Sorry, Julian. My apologies. It's so far away, Speaker. Thank you, page Julian.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MANDATORY BLOOD TESTING ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE DÉPISTAGE OBLIGATOIRE PAR TEST SANGUIN

Mr. Kwinter moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 28, An Act to require the taking and analysing of blood samples to protect victims of crime, emergency service workers, good Samaritans and other persons and to make consequential amendments to the Health Care Consent Act, 1996 and the Health Protection and Promotion Act / Projet de loi 28, Loi exigeant le prélèvement et l'analyse d'échantillons de sang afin de protéger les victimes d'actes criminels, le personnel des services d'urgence, les bons samaritains et d'autres personnes et apportant des modifications corrélatives à la Loi de 1996 sur le consentement aux soins de santé et à la Loi sur la protection et la promotion de la santé.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the minister.

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): In November of last year, I introduced Bill 28, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this legislation again on third reading. I'll be sharing my time today with my parliamentary assistant for community safety, the member from Scarborough-Rouge River, Bas Balkissoon.

Permit me to recognize Mr. Bruce Miller of the Police Association of Ontario. He was instrumental in assisting us with this legislation, and we thank him for all his efforts. I'd also like to recognize Mr. Fred LeBlanc, of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, for his continued support of this bill. Both are in the gallery today for the debate, and both of these gentlemen represent the interests of the men and women at the front lines of the police and fire services in this province. They have been steadfast defenders of the members of their associations and have made valuable presentations to my ministry and to the committee on this bill. I thank them for their support and guidance through all of the stages of this legislative effort.

Bill 28 is about securing the health and safety and the peace of mind of those whom we rely on for our own

protection, of victims of crime and of those who provide emergency health care services or emergency first aid.

The McGuinty government is on the side of families concerned about crime and safety and recognizes the need to safeguard community safety personnel by ensuring that they are protected while they protect the citizens of Ontario. Every effort must be made to support those who protect us as they go about the challenging tasks in communities across Ontario. That concern is particularly pressing for emergency workers and victims of crime. Every day across Ontario, thousands of men and women in a variety of occupations—police, paramedics and firefighters, for example—work to keep our communities safe. In the process, they face the risk of being infected by communicable diseases—HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B or hepatitis C—through contact with members of the public. Bill 28, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act, could help make Ontarians safer and provide greater peace of mind for those who may be exposed to the risk of infection through their work.

This proposed legislation would give exposed individuals and their doctors more timely information to help them decide on the best way to reduce the risk of illness. If passed, this bill will help to protect our community safety workers as they put themselves at risk to help the people of Ontario. This bill would also apply to victims of crime and good Samaritans.

1530

The current provisions for mandatory blood sampling date from 2003, when a private member's bill, Bill 105, came into effect. It amended the Health Protection and Promotion Act to help victims of crime and first aid responders who may have been exposed to HIV/AIDS or hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Ontario was the first province to adopt such legislation.

Several other provinces have since introduced similar legislation. Nova Scotia's legislation, though not yet proclaimed, received royal assent on October 18, 2004; Saskatchewan proclaimed its legislation on October 17, 2005; and in Alberta, the legislation received royal assent on May 24, 2006, and is awaiting proclamation.

The need to create a mechanism for the mandatory testing of blood in the specific circumstances contemplated by this proposed legislation is now well established in Ontario as well as in other jurisdictions. It is an important community safety issue and I'm sure all members of the House appreciate that. The issue now is, how can we best reassure those providing emergency health care services and emergency first aid, and victims of crime, about their risk of infection in a timely and efficient way while protecting the privacy of respondents at the same time?

Bill 105 amended the Health Protection and Promotion Act to require the taking of blood samples to protect victims of crime, emergency service workers, good Samaritans and others. The amendment, which is found in section 22.1 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, enables persons who have come in contact with the bodily substance of another person while pro-

viding emergency health care services, emergency first aid, or as a result of being the victim of crime to apply to a medical officer of health to determine the HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B and hepatitis C status of the source of the exposure.

Premier McGuinty was approached by our emergency first responders to make this blood-testing regime more efficient and effective so that it would provide those exposed the much-needed peace of mind sooner. We listened to those concerns and introduced Bill 28 to address them. The Mandatory Blood Testing Act, 2006, would, if passed, replace section 22.1 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act with new community safety legislation for mandatory blood sampling.

The government views this proposed legislation as an important community safety issue. The mental stress and lifestyle changes experienced by a person who may have been exposed to infection while protecting us, or as the victim of crime, should not be underestimated. That person is often placed in a cruel limbo caused by the uncertainty of not knowing whether they have or may become infected. That limbo often means submitting to a potent precautionary drug regimen with serious side effects to reduce the risk and severity of infection. Mandatory blood testing is a means to reduce this anxiety and provide a measure of certainty and peace of mind for emergency service personnel and for victims of crime.

It is no wonder, then, that the legislation has had the benefit of extensive input from stakeholders most likely to be affected by its provisions. Since the bill was first introduced, through second reading and at committee, we've had the benefit of very thoughtful contributions from members of this Legislature. Key stakeholders have also weighed in on the debate surrounding Bill 28 with very poignant and reasoned presentations on the potential impacts of the bill on their own work and lives.

Members of this House could not be unmoved by the testimony of Constable Natalie Hiltz of the Peel Regional Police Service. Constable Hiltz told the committee that while attempting to arrest a known prostitute, a heavy intravenous drug user and street person thought to be HIV-positive, she was bitten on the hand, causing the skin to break. She immediately went to hospital where she was prescribed a drug cocktail to stave off contraction. The person who bit her refused to be tested.

Constable Hiltz suffered severe side effects, including chronic fatigue and nausea, from the drugs she was obliged to take. The emotional effects were worse. She had been warned that the drugs could cause cancer or birth defects, and Constable Hiltz was only 26 at the time.

She was able to get through the ordeal with the help of family, friends and colleagues. Fortunately, her story had a happy ending. She has been given a clean bill of health; her fiancé is now her husband and they are now the parents of two wonderful children. Her account of her experience was a stirring reminder of why we need to act to protect those who protect us. Through her presentation, members of the committee were made aware in very vivid terms of the real impact of our actions on the real lives of the people in this province. We were left in

no doubt of the need for this legislation. To Constable Hiltz, I say thank you for sharing and bringing home to us a reality that most of us can only imagine.

I also want to express thanks on behalf of the government to all the stakeholders whose input has helped us craft this bill. I also want to acknowledge the contributions of other groups, who have been valuable in assisting us in drafting the bill, such as the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, the Information and Privacy Commissioner and many other health professionals. While the government cannot support some of the suggestions made by participants in the process, we have made a number of significant amendments to the original draft in response to stakeholder input. My parliamentary assistant will address these in his presentation.

Essentially, the existing legislative provisions of section 22.1 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act prescribe that if a person who is the source of a possible infection does not voluntarily provide a blood sample, a medical officer of health can order the required sampling and testing. After two years of experience with that legislation, we heard from our partners about the challenges faced by those involved in the process. We heard the concerns of the medical community, the policing community and the public safety community about the ways in which the existing legislation could be made more responsive to the needs of stakeholders. Medical officers of health expressed serious reservations about having the responsibility to order persons to provide blood samples. They believe that it would be better to move responsibility for ordering a person to provide a blood sample from the health system to an independent body. And we responded. Decisions on whether to grant an application for mandatory blood sampling would, if the proposed legislation were passed, be made by the Consent and Capacity Board. Medical officers of health would continue to be responsible for screening initial applications and seeking voluntary samples, but they would be removed from the responsibility to act as adjudicators.

Stakeholders in the policing community also presented their positions on the existing legislation. They are concerned at the length of time it takes at present to complete the process of mandatory blood testing. The police also want to see the categories of person who can apply for mandatory blood samples broadened to specifically include police officers and persons in certain high-risk occupations and environments. We've heard the concerns of the policing community that the process be simplified, that timelines be shortened and that police be specifically designated in the eligibility criteria. The legislation I'm proposing would authorize the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services to make regulations specifying eligible occupations.

We've also heard from community safety workers that they want; among other things, faster resolution of applications. If passed, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act would streamline the process and achieve faster decisions. The period for voluntary compliance would be re-

duced from seven days to two days. The current process has taken up to 69 days to complete. Should the proposed legislation be passed, this process will be reduced to 19 days. That's a big improvement. This means significant reductions in the time for processing these applications and a significant reduction in anxiety for our public safety workers. By streamlining the process for applications, as proposed in this bill, we would ensure that applications are dealt with in an efficient, effective and timely manner for all concerned.

We are also keenly aware of the privacy issues for those responding to an order for a blood sample. To that end, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act, if passed, would restrict the use of any blood samples taken to the purposes set out in the legislation and its regulations. It would be an offence to use the samples for any other purpose. This proposed approach resolves many of the issues that concern our community safety workers, while at the same time respecting the interests of the applicant, respondent and health care workers.

1540

The proposed Mandatory Blood Testing Act captures the intent and spirit of the original legislation and seeks to respond to the concerns raised by our partners in community safety. This bill is the outcome of the productive working relationship between the McGuinty government and many stakeholders. It addresses the need of our emergency service personnel and of victims of crime to find out quickly whether they risk infection from a blood-borne virus.

This bill reflects our government's plan to strengthen our province by strengthening our most important competitive advantage: our people. If passed, the bill would resolve many of the issues that concern our community safety workers and give them the peace of mind to go about their work with greater confidence, and that means greater safety and security for all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough—Rouge River): I want to thank the minister for sharing his time and allowing me an opportunity to make a contribution to Bill 28, mandatory blood testing, third reading.

I'm pleased to speak in support of Bill 28, the Mandatory Blood Testing Act, 2006. If passed, the bill will repeal the existing provisions on mandatory blood sampling in section 22.1 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act and replace them with stand-alone legislation that better meets the needs of our emergency workers. I want to emphasize that the aims and objectives of Bill 28 are exactly the same as those of the legislation it proposes to replace. It differs from the existing legislation only in relation to the processes employed to achieve the same results. These process improvements arise out of the government's consideration of the reasonable concerns and recommendations of the stakeholders most affected by or involved with the application of the provisions of the bill.

They also reflect this government's concern for victims of crime and our support for our police partners and

other community safety workers. Their safety is a priority for us.

The current legislation provides that a local medical officer of health may issue an order for a blood sample upon application by an individual who has come into contact with a bodily substance of another individual as a result of being a victim of crime, or while providing emergency services or first aid, or while performing a function set out in regulation. The blood sample would be tested for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B, hepatitis C or other communicable diseases set out in regulation.

The current process has taken anywhere from five days to 69 days, depending on a variety of factors. During this period, affected persons would undergo the stress of not knowing whether they had been infected with a serious disease and, in many cases, may be advised to undergo precautionary treatment with its attendant side effects, which may result in personal lifestyle changes until the results are known.

The current legislation came into effect in September 2003, before the McGuinty government took office. Since then, we've heard from stakeholders about their concerns and their recommendations for improving the process.

Police and emergency personnel have expressed concerns about lengthy delays in the application and hearing process. They are also concerned that the breadth of the circumstances in which they may come into contact with bodily substances is not captured by the wording of the current legislation, which refers to a victim of crime or emergency health care. The policing community felt that exposure from an accident or during the lawful performance of duties may not adequately be dealt with.

Medical officers of health have told us that they are uncomfortable with their quasi-judicial role as adjudicators under the existing scheme, a role that they contend is inconsistent with their role as physicians.

Many stakeholders expressed the need to move responsibility for obtaining an order from the health system.

Bill 28 aims to address these stakeholders' concerns by proposing the following: streamlining the process to achieve quicker resolution of applications; ensuring that applications are dealt with in an efficient, effective and timely manner for all concerned; and balancing the interests of the applicant, respondent and those involved in administering the process by transferring responsibility for deciding on applications from medical officers of health to the Consent and Capacity Board.

The proposed changes include time frames that would shorten the process from application to order. In particular, the period for voluntary compliance would be shortened to two days from seven days, and shorter time frames for the hearing process would be set out in this legislation.

If passed, Bill 28 would provide that a person who came into contact with a bodily substance of another person while providing emergency first aid, as a victim of crime or in other prescribed circumstances, may apply to a medical officer of health to have the blood of the other

person analyzed for HIV/AIDS and/or hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

If, within two days, the medical officer of health fails to get the other person to voluntarily provide a blood sample, the medical officer of health would refer the applicant to the Consent and Capacity Board. The Consent and Capacity Board would be required to hold and conclude a hearing into the application within seven days after the application is referred to it and would be empowered to order the person to provide a blood sample for analysis. Medical officers of health would no longer be involved in the decision or in a supervisory capacity after an order is issued. The Consent and Capacity Board would have to give its decision one day after concluding a hearing. A maximum time frame would be prescribed in regulation. Physicians and other legally qualified health care practitioners would be protected from liability for complying with an order to take or analyze a blood sample.

Bill 28 proposes that the Consent and Capacity Board have responsibility for making an order for mandatory blood samples. The Consent and Capacity Board is an independent provincial tribunal that has been in existence since 1968. Its mission is to ensure the fair and accessible adjudication of consent and capacity issues, balancing the rights of vulnerable individuals with public safety.

The board's key areas of activity are the adjudication of matters of capacity, consent, civil committal and substitute decision-making. It conducts hearings under the Mental Health Act, the Personal Health Information Protection Act and the Substitute Decisions Act. The Consent and Capacity Board has a strong education and outreach program designed to bring about shorter, more focused hearings; it is accustomed to dealing with hearings with a short turnaround time.

If passed, Bill 28 would also respond to the concerns raised by police and others about the uncertainty in the present legislation as to the circumstances that could permit an application for mandatory blood sample. In addition to victims of crime and persons providing emergency health care services or emergency first aid, the bill would make eligible to apply a person who came into contact with the bodily substance of another person in the course of his or her duties, if the person belongs to a prescribed class, and/or while being involved in a prescribed circumstance or while carrying out a prescribed activity.

Under the proposed bill, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services would be authorized to make regulations defining the prescribed classes and the circumstances and activities that could give rise to an application for an order. By having a provision to spell out the classes and the circumstances in the regulations, the legislation would retain the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances.

Through a process of consultation and consensus-building with stakeholders and the public, we can assure that the regulations remain up to date, practical and practicable, while respecting the objectives of the proposed legislation.

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In closing, let me summarize the benefits of this proposed legislation. The Mandatory Blood Testing Act, if passed, would speed up the application and hearing process for obtaining a blood sample. It would also transfer the power to make an order from a medical officer of health to the Consent and Capacity Board. If passed, this bill will protect our community safety workers and provide the peace of mind to allow them to do their work with greater confidence as they put themselves at risk to help the people of Ontario.

We have to do all we can to support those who protect us as they go about their challenging tasks in communities across Ontario. If passed, Bill 28 would be an important step in achieving this objective.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): It's an honour to have an opportunity to honour all of those who give their time for our safety. Certainly, I recognize our guests in the members' gallery and also all those in my own riding of Parkdale-High Park. In Parkdale-High Park, we have a problem with drug use, petty crime and prostitution, and our firefighters, our police, our paramedics and our nursing staff all put themselves in harm's way for us.

I also speak personally. My husband was a police officer for a couple of years before he went into even more dangerous intellectual work in academia. He has a great deal of respect for all of those officers on the force as well.

The last time I spoke about this bill I mentioned the wonderful story that our general, Roméo Dallaire, told about Canadian troops, some of the bravest in the world, who went into places that other troops wouldn't go. One of them was to help some women who had been attacked, who had been raped and mutilated, and who had been left for dead. The soldiers, without hesitation, went in to help when other troops would not, risking injury, risking exactly the kind of situation that this bill addresses.

Of course, as New Democrats, we would support a move like Bill 28. There's no question that we will support this. I think there's a sense of irony, though, with which we do support it—and, trust me, after a couple of months of being in this House, my sense of irony is well honed—because of the fact that this government brought in this bill on November 15, 2005. This government has a majority. This government can do basically anything it wants, yet it's taken this long to get to this point in time with this bill. One has to ask how many people have been infected in that length of time while this government has been—doing what, one can ask—working this bill very slowly through the system.

This certainly is something that should have been passed a long time ago. In a sense, it's a kind of large amendment to Mr. Dunlop's Bill 105 that came in again a while ago—and thanks be to that member for doing that piece of work. It speaks to the inefficiencies and it speaks to the lack of regard, I think, of the McGuinty government for exactly those people whom this bill addresses: those people who put their lives on the line for us every day.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? Response? No. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On behalf of New Democrats, I'm pleased to indicate our support for this bill and our pleasure that the bill is now before this chamber for third reading. I tell interested people that the vote on third reading will indeed occur today.

I, like my colleague Ms. DiNovo from Parkdale-High Park, want to acknowledge the incredible work that Garfield Dunlop, the member from Simcoe North, put into this proposition. He was the author of the seminal bill that brought this matter forward, and he pursued the matter with great tenacity. The bill was voted through second reading, went into committee—I remember serving on committee with him—and then became law.

Bill 28 is an effort to fine-tune the bill as it was originally passed. One of the big issues, of course, was a concern about inordinate delays, and the bill has gone some way to addressing that. I'm not sure it's gone as far as we could have. That remains to be seen.

One of the problems we have, I say to the minister—and his parliamentary assistant will know this full well from having stewarded this bill through committee—is the lack of hard data. We tried to get information about the total number of applications made pursuant to the existing legislation and how they were resolved. We got a rough sense, because there's rough data out there. Approximately 50% of all requests are dealt with through voluntary compliance by the person whose blood had the capacity or potential to infect the correctional officer, police officer or paramedic—or good Samaritan, for that matter. That's by and large a good thing. The purpose of the bill should be to ensure that for all persons who have put themselves, in good faith and with a sense of altruism, into a position where their health is at risk, there is sufficient participation in the analytical process, blood testing and so on, to give that person some comfort level about whether or not they might have contracted a disease. If they haven't contracted a disease, God bless; if they have, they can immediately begin the medications and treatment responses necessary.

Of course, I acknowledge the presence and participation in this process by Fred LeBlanc from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, as well as Bruce Miller from the Police Association of Ontario. I know that Mr. Miller was speaking with some of my colleagues, Mr. Runciman and others, last night about the bill and its course through the Legislature. I know that Mr. Runciman indicated to Mr. Miller his own personal—Mr. Runciman's—enthusiasm about the bill's progress. I'm pleased that they had an opportunity to discuss this matter. I'm pleased that they had a chance to get together to talk about Bill 28. I'm sorry I couldn't be there, but I trust that there will be other occasions when we can talk about things that go on here at Queen's Park as they impact on police officers.

I also want you to note, Speaker, the presence today in the members' gallery of two workers from Welland: Tom Napper, president of CAW Local 523, and Rick Alakas, president of CAW Local 275 in Welland. Rick Alakas is

also a newly elected city councillor for the city of Welland. I'm very proud of him having returned to municipal politics. He had a brief hiatus, but he's back now. I know it takes a tremendous toll on people and their families, and I know Mr. Alakas's family. I know their incredible support for him. It's interesting, because Mr. Napper is here, and his son, Tom Napper Jr., is a firefighter in St. Catharines. So Mr. Napper understands full well the speed with which firefighters put themselves into situations of high danger and great risk. Situations that others are fleeing from, firefighters run to.

You should also know that Tom Napper represents those workers at Haun Drop Forge who were told today that that historic drop forge in Welland is shutting down. Of course, that has been a significant blow to them and their families. Retrain them? We're talking about guys who for 30 and 35 years have operated hammers in the forge. I've been through that forge. Have you ever seen work like that? That's dangerous work too, hammer operator. You see, nowadays they're chained to their machine, literally, with restraints. It's a safety device so they can't move their hand far enough to get it under the hammer. But you can tell who the old-timers are, because they're the ones who literally do have to take their socks off to count to 20. It's dangerous work—hard-working men and women in that industry in Welland.

I recall earlier today the Minister of Finance saying in response to a query about the huge job loss across Ontario that, oh, well, the province is going to retrain them. To do what? Like Rosario Marchese says, are you going to take a hammer operator from the forge and train them to be a barista at Starbuck's? Don't tell me you're going to teach them how to deal blackjack and send them to the casino, because the casino is laying off workers, the same workers who were trained two years ago to be casino workers. There is a serious problem in this province around job losses—huge, huge job losses and the prospect of many more.

1600

I understand that the Premier is leading a junket to India in January. You know what happens then: a big entourage of hangers-on, wannabes and backbench MPPs—an entourage, a junket to India, what, to find markets for Canadian or Ontario products? Not likely. The only market in India is for Ontario jobs. Maybe the Premier can help some call centres relocate while he's there, huh?—from Ontario to India. Maybe the Premier can assist some of these drop forges that are dropping like flies in Ontario as the owners job their work out to Asian manufacturing locations, huh?

That's embarrassing and shameful. How much more do we have to hear about Tom Parkinson and his trips to Australia being paid for on the corporate tab? Or the public corporate tab, because it's the people of Ontario who pay for it. How much do we have to hear about Tom Parkinson and 45 Gs charged back to his secretary's credit card? Tom Parkinson, who was held in such high esteem by the Liberals that he gets a \$500,000 bonus, gets a little pat on the wrist for the joyrides in the com-

pany helicopter. A good friend of the Liberals—Tom Parkinson. He's a million-dollar friend, he's a Conrad Black friend, he's a Barbara Amiel friend. Hell, he shouldn't just be losing his job; he should be going to jail. Well, think about it. It's called stealing corporate funds, and the corporate owners happen to be the people of Ontario: you, you and you—your families, your constituents, your kids and their friends.

This has become a province of high rollers and jet-setters; junkets to India are the rule of the day; jobs are going to hell in a handbasket in our own backyards; and the Premier is off touring South Asia.

I do want to speak more to Bill 28, of course, because New Democrats are absolutely committed to worker safety. I say to this chamber, as I've had occasion to say to oh-so-many workers in oh-so-many venues, that it's never wrong to fight for good jobs, to keep good jobs in your community and your province; it's never wrong to fight for safer workplaces, to fight for the right—and I believe it's a right—to come home, maybe a little more tired than when you went out in the morning but as healthy as you were when you went to work at 6 a.m. And that applies to firefighters, police officers; it applies to industrial workers too.

I suppose Haun Drop Forge employees won't have to worry about coming home safe from work, will they? They won't have any jobs; they won't be coming home from work. Do you know what that means? Once EI is over, it means welfare. Middle-class, hard-working—and it's hard work. It is hard work, I tell you. No Gucci loafers from Queen's Park ever set foot in any drop forge in this province, I'll tell you that. It's hard, dirty work; dangerous. From a middle-class lifestyle, paying taxes, lots of them—income taxes, property taxes, sales taxes—one year or less of EI, employment insurance, to welfare. What that means is that marriages break down, that kids who were enrolled in college and university drop out. What that means is that social issues, personal problems like alcoholism and drug abuse increase—because those are the sorts of things that are nurtured by that instant joblessness and the despair that's created. That means that a community loses yet even more of its property tax base, so Councillor Rick Alakas is going to be faced with that problem, that dilemma, as well.

This government takes junkets to south Asia. What's that going to cost? Two hundred, 300 grand? Maybe half a million? What do you think, Speaker? Or are they just putting it on the secretary's credit card, like Tom Parkinson does, hoping that they're going to hide the expense?

We're pleased that Bill 28 has come to third reading, pleased that it's going to become law. I do want to compliment Bas Balkissoon, the parliamentary assistant, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River. I believe this is his first bill as PA to the Minister of Community Safety—it was his second one, but it's the first one I noticed. The parliamentary assistant did an outstanding job of stewarding this through committee. He was a pleasure to work with. He really was, because there were issues raised, for instance, by medical officers of health

about them being the person responsible for enforcing the order. I know I talked to those same people the parliamentary assistant did. He, the parliamentary assistant, was responsive. He went back and sold the proposition to policy people and was successful in doing that, so I compliment him.

Applause.

Mr. Kormos: That's Mr. Berardinetti applauding, not Mr. Balkissoon. Mind you, Mr. Fonseca sat silent through the whole opportunity to applaud his colleague, Mr. Balkissoon. For the life of me, I haven't the slightest idea of what Mr. Fonseca has against his colleague. Perhaps it's a personal thing. Perhaps they simply don't like each other.

I was proud to be able to work on this committee with the Conservative members and with Mr. Balkissoon as the parliamentary assistant, pleased to be able to make some progress around increasing the effectiveness of this legislation. I do regret that there was a lost opportunity. I was an advocate of using justices of the peace as the persons to whom one applied for, effectively, a warrant to get the blood. JPs are out there. They should be out there all over the place 24/7 in all parts of the province. They're accessible via videocam. Again, the program isn't particularly successful yet, but ideally they would be accessible by videocam, so that even in the most remote parts of the province you'd have relatively instant access. JPs are used to giving search warrants. They provide search warrants now for intrusive searches, for instance. I thought they were an eminently logical body to have performed that role. Others—Liberals—indicated that they didn't think JPs were competent enough to do that. I found that an unfortunate observation, especially as there's a concerted government effort, as we're told, to improve the quality of justice of the peace performance here in the province of Ontario.

Here we are: The bill will go to a vote. I trust it will pass. I look forward to the ministry being able to provide precise data over the course of the months and years to come so we can assess the effectiveness of the amendments that are contained in this bill and consider the need for yet more changes, should they be required.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Ms. DiNovo: Again, it's a pleasure to rise and to speak about Bill 28. It will pass today, and we're pleased about that. We're pleased for the work it's going to achieve in making the workplace safer for all of those who put their lives on the line.

I want to take a bit of an opportunity as well to talk about another way in which we can make safety first and foremost, and that is, I hope, by passing another bill. That's Bill 30, which is bringing in safety-engineered sharps as law.

Just to go over a little of what that's about, many of the injuries we've been talking about in debate on this bill are injuries caused by hypodermic needles. These are needless and senseless injuries, especially in light of the fact that we have a bill before the House, Ms. Martel's

bill, that would make that redundant, in that we wouldn't have hypodermic needles. We would have, in fact, safety-engineered sharps.

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I wanted to share with the House a few of the statistics around that: 33,000, for example, is the estimated annual number of needle-stick injuries in the health care sector; 17,000 is the estimated annual number of needle-stick injuries in acute care alone; \$64 million is the estimated annual cost of testing and treating needle-stick injuries in the health care sector, and that does not even account for additional needle-stick injuries outside of the health care sector; \$32 million is the estimated annual cost of testing and treating needle-stick injuries in acute care alone; \$22 million is the estimated cost to completely convert all acute care workplaces in Ontario to safety-engineered devices—far, far less; \$4 million is the estimated amount the Ontario government will save by replacing conventional needles in acute care after realizing an 82% drop in injuries.

Just to continue along with some of the statistics which I think we should take to heart if we were really serious about workplace safety and worker safety and that we would put into effect: \$2,000, the minimum cost of testing and providing preventive treatment for each worker who suffers a needle-stick injury; 190, the estimated number of needle-stick injuries every day—this is in Canada; a frightening statistic, I think, and we know that many of our front-line workers in the safety field are those needle-stick injury statistics; 69,719, the estimated number of needle-stick injuries every year; 750,000, the estimated number of workers in health care across the country who are susceptible to these injuries; and \$140 million, the estimated minimum cost of testing and preventive treatment for needle-stick injuries alone.

I draw the Speaker's attention also to the fact that we're falling behind the curve as a province that doesn't have legislation in this regard. April 30, 2004, was the date Alberta implemented safety sharps regulation. January 1, 2006, was the date Manitoba's and Saskatchewan's regulations took effect, and January 1, 2007, is the date Nova Scotia's regulation will take effect. January 1, 2008, is the date British Columbia's regulation will take effect. Of course, there are coalitions active that want this legislation in Ontario, Newfoundland and also New Brunswick. This kind of legislation has been in place in the States for quite a while now: 1997 was when California mandated the use of its safety-engineered sharps devices.

I call upon the McGuinty government, if they're really serious about protecting our workers from injuries involving blood products, to really move quickly, certainly a lot more quickly than they have on their own Bill 28, to bring in Bill 30, which is Shelley Martel's bill.

Again, I point this House's and the attention of all of those viewers who are at home to the ineffectiveness of this government in fact doing much at all to protect workers. I draw this House's attention and the attention all of those viewers at home to the Auditor General's

report and what it points out about the ineffectiveness of this government in terms of protecting its most vulnerable. It's very interesting, the response that we've received from all of the ministers about their ministries in light of the Auditor General's report, looking around, behind them, looking down, looking at their colleagues, looking everywhere else but in the mirror as to who is responsible for what goes on in their ministries.

My background is in part in business, and I know that in business if you are the chief executive officer of a company, you don't wait for Revenue Canada to come in and audit your books to know what's actually going on in your company, that you actually take an active interest every day, every week about what's going on in your company, and you are liable to the shareholders for what goes on in your company. I'd like to see some liability on behalf of our ministers to what goes on in their ministries. I'd like to know what they've been doing for these four years in terms of doing their own audits of what goes on.

Who has taken up the cause of children and youth and child services? Who is taking up the cause of the workers whom you have heard Mr. Kormos speak about losing their jobs because of what amounts to nothing more than lining one's own pockets at Hydro One and the OPG and, of course, the list goes on. What about those children who have had unnecessary CT scans under Mr. Smitherman's health watch? Who looks out for them? Surely this is the place where the buck does stop and this is the place where we have to answer not only to those in our ministries, as the cabinet ministers do, but to the entire electorate of Ontario. So I draw attention to that. Who else is suffering, what other front-line workers are suffering under the watch of the McGuinty government? Certainly, we have 120,000 households in Ontario waiting for housing. We have 65,000 households in Toronto alone and in the GTA waiting for housing—no housing comes. We've asked over and over again questions of Mr. Gerretsen about housing. We've received few answers.

One of the questions that's on the order paper right now that I still haven't got an answer for is how many \$300- to \$400-units he has provided for our most vulnerable. I suspect the answer is none, because I haven't received it yet. That's pretty sad, because \$300 to \$400 a month is exactly what one can afford if one is earning minimum wage or OW or ODSP, that is, the poorest and most vulnerable front-line folk in our society.

What about small business owners? My constituency office in Parkdale-High Park is on Dundas Street West, a street where many storefronts are empty. Who's looking out for those front-line workers? Who's looking out for those who pay an inordinate amount of commercial property tax in comparison to other jurisdictions? Who's looking out for the artists, many of them who make minimum wage? Who's looking out for those artists who are in fear right now, many of them, of losing not only their livelihood but their houses because of this unfair taxation system? Who's looking out for the children? We

have no status-of-the-artist legislation in this province. We have no protection for child artists who work in the arts. Who's looking out for those front-line workers as well? Who's looking out for the 13,500 children who use our food banks in the GTA, who don't have enough to eat? Many of them come from working families. Who's looking out for the front-line workers who line up at the food banks, many of them women who head single-parent families and who work at minimum wage? Imagine how safe your life is if you earn minimum wage, which is a mere \$7.75. Sad—nobody is looking out for those front-line workers.

Back in 1972, it used to be \$2 an hour, and if you use the Bank of Canada's inflation calculator, that's just under \$10 a day. So we're not asking for a raise in the minimum wage; we're asking for catch-up for some of our most vulnerable workers. Who's looking out for those women and children? I see them, because I volunteer at a food bank and I volunteer at a breakfast program in my riding—a wonderful one, by the way, at Masaryk-Cowan, run by Ram. Who do you see at the breakfast program? You see children and their families, many of them immigrants, many of them workers. Who's looking out for those workers? Who's looking out for those children? This is a government that says it's safety conscious, but safety for whom? For a very small proportion of people. Again, it's taken them over a year to just get to this point, even for them.

So we don't hold out a lot of hope, do we, Mr. Speaker, for the McGuinty government? We don't hold out hope that they really do care for the vulnerable in their midst and that they really do care for front-line workers and they really do care for all of those who put their lives on the line every day in one way, shape or form.

So of course, yes, I do support, as do all New Democrats, the passage of this bill, Bill 28. We support this. Our Christmas wish, if we have one, is that the same kind of compassion that goes into this bill for these workers can go into compassion for all the workers of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Time for questions and comments. Seeing none, further debate?

Seeing none, Mr. Kwinter has moved third reading of Bill 28. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

PUBLIC SERVICE OF ONTARIO
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006
LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
AYANT TRAIT À LA
FONCTION PUBLIQUE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 27, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 158, An Act to revise legislation relating to the public service of Ontario by repealing the Public Service Act, enacting the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006 and the Ontario

Provincial Police Collective Bargaining Act, 2006 and making complementary amendments to various Acts and by amending various Acts in respect of the successor rights of certain public servants / Projet de loi 158, Loi visant à réviser des lois ayant trait à la fonction publique de l'Ontario en abrogeant la Loi sur la fonction publique, en édictant la Loi de 2006 sur la fonction publique de l'Ontario et la Loi de 2006 sur la négociation collective relative à la Police provinciale de l'Ontario, en apportant des modifications complémentaires à diverses lois et en modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne la succession aux qualités pour certains fonctionnaires.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Debate? Seeing none, Mr. Phillips has moved second reading of Bill 158. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on general government.

The Acting Speaker: So be it.

Orders of the day.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The deputy House leader moves adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m. of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1620.

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Ernie Parsons, Khalil Ramal
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 11 December 2006

Lundi 11 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 11 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 11 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I rise today because the government continues to say anything to get elected while failing to address the real problems facing the people of Ontario.

Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the recent Auditor General's report. In fact, it's just a long list of examples of Dalton McGuinty's lack of respect for taxpayers' money. Just take, for example, the executives from the children's aid society driving around in \$60,000 SUVs and the misuse of corporate credit cards.

The Dalton McGuinty government is spending \$5.7 billion more than he promised in the last election. He has increased spending in non-health-related ministries by almost 20%. Ask yourself: Is it any better?

The Auditor General's report shows that this government has not kept its promise; indeed, a promise to the people of Ontario during the election. The McGuinty government must be held accountable. It's time that Dalton McGuinty started to take the job seriously about respecting taxpayers' money and stopped treating it as if it's Monopoly money.

In my own riding, I could often recite the concerns I've had with the degree of public spending. The lack of accountability is what's more important. When you come down to a government that would say anything and perhaps do anything to get elected, one has to begin to question one's trust in a government that doesn't keep its word.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I stand today to inform the Legislature about more good news regarding health care coming from the riding of Huron-Bruce.

The Clinton family health team that was announced during the summer is now in full operation and has just recently hired two new nurse practitioners and one lead administrator to help staff the operation. This is in addition to the six family physicians who are already under the employ of the family health team. The Clinton

family health team has also been approved for a social worker, and a psychologist will also be employed. This will offer a wide range of services to the community.

The family health teams will also be beneficial for attracting new doctors and other health care practitioners because doctors will be aware that these teams create a very supportive environment where they don't have to work on their own.

We are all aware that people do not become ill only between the hours of 9 and 5. The residents of Clinton and surrounding areas will benefit from improved access to health care services thanks to the new family health team and its staff.

The Clinton family health team is one of 150 created by the Dalton McGuinty government since April 2005. These family health teams are a very innovative idea for delivering the very best health care to those who are not within close proximity of large urban medical centres, and they are another example of the many ways that this government is improving Ontario's health care system, especially for all of our rural communities.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): I stand today on behalf of thousands of Ontarians who have been marginalized by the misguided policies, broken promises and betrayal of the McGuinty Liberal government. Since taking power in October 2003, Ontario's economy has gone from Canada's first to worst. Once the proud engine of Canada's economy, Ontario has now become the economic caboose of this country. This government's dismal record on the economy has seen the demise of the forest industry in northern Ontario and now the beginning of the demise of the domestic auto parts industry in southern Ontario. An industry that once boasted over 106,000 jobs has seen its workforce cut by over 10,000 jobs in less than two years under the McGuinty government.

Sources indicate that 3,000 jobs have been lost at Magna, with more to come; 770 at Dana Corp.; and 280 at Dura Automotive. The list goes on and on.

Where is this government on this file? Announcements and reannouncements aren't solving the problem. They only show that this government will say anything to get re-elected. Throwing money at something doesn't make a problem go away, Premier—unless that problem is the CEO at Hydro One.

A year ago, this Legislature passed a motion calling on the government to come up with a comprehensive plan on jobs and the economy. To date, we have seen nothing.

This is yet another broken promise from this government. The list of broken promises is growing extensively. These broken promises are directly affecting the fate of thousands of Ontarians who used to work in the auto parts sector or the forest industry and now find themselves out of a job as a consequence of your government's lack of planning.

HEARING LOSS

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I rise in the House today to thank Richard Bowring of the Hearing Foundation of Canada and Principal Bill Yull and Vice-Principal Gary Birch of Gordon Price public school for inviting me to join a Sound Sense education presentation.

If props were allowed in the House, perhaps I should have my iPod and my earbuds in and be doing a rap to speak to the statement that I present. These presentations are taking place all over Ontario in schools today. Hearing loss is a serious public health concern that affects more than one in 10 Canadians. This presentation was creatively designed to enhance understanding by our young people. Research shows that the better children hear, the better they learn.

With the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Hearing Foundation of Canada launched its Sound Sense: Save Your Hearing for the Music campaign. This campaign is being presented to grade 6 students, teaching them the importance of protecting their hearing from loud noise. The Sound Sense program teaches young people what a marvellous sense hearing is. But, most importantly, it teaches our young people how they would suffer hearing loss. I took their advice this weekend and put earplugs in when I found myself in front of a very large, loud amplifier.

I want to thank the students and staff of Gordon Price public school for their wonderful tour, demonstrating their pride in their school. Everyone I met was so welcoming and gracious, and a special thank you to Jaclynn Fitz-Maurice and Anna Choi for their leadership role in the student council of Gordon Price public school.

1340

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Dalton McGuinty doesn't want to talk about his record of broken promises, weak leadership and inability to get results for the people of Ontario. This government is trying to change the channel from the reality that wait times are going up, the doctor shortage is getting worse, cars are stuck in gridlock and crime is on the rise.

As the Auditor General reported, this government allowed \$60,000 to be spent by the children's aid society on SUVs instead of using that money to help foster children in need. The McGuinty Liberals have cobbled together damage control when they should have been focused for the last several months on acting to help Ontario's most vulnerable children. They have failed miser-

ably to end the culture of misspending at Hydro One by refusing to justify a \$500,000 bonus given to the company's president after he chose to break the rules and charge \$50,000 in expenses to his secretary's credit card. On health care, Dalton McGuinty refuses to be open with Ontarians about wait times after he ran misleading ads, only to be found out by the Auditor General that his wait time numbers are bogus.

It's time that Dalton McGuinty started to get serious about respecting taxpayers' money and stopped treating it like Monopoly money. After another sitting of this Legislature, we've seen Dalton McGuinty continue to say anything to get elected and re-elected.

Dalton McGuinty's leadership is weak, and he's failing to get better results for the people of Ontario.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): As I knew would happen when the minister's long-delayed public meeting about the soot problem in Hamilton East was finally held last week, people are disgusted by the lack of McGuinty government action on this environmental nightmare.

They are angry that no charges have been laid against the corporate polluters even though the minister knows or strongly suspects who is responsible. No amount of Liberal double-talk can erase this greasy, falling black soot that has caused widespread property damage.

The Minister of the Environment has spoken so proudly of the McGuinty government's response to date, but Hamilton East residents know better. One woman at Thursday night's meeting echoed the sentiments of everyone: The soot is ruining the quality of their lives. No matter where it came from, it's the minister's job to protect the environment and ensure that the soot sources are identified and stopped.

According to respected local environmentalists, there are incidents of emissions every day, yet the Ministry of the Environment has not charged or fined anyone. What a disgrace.

For six months, my pointed questions and letters to the minister about a deluge of carbon emissions raining down on homes and businesses were met with the minister's claims that everything that could be done was being done. Meanwhile, Hamilton Liberal MPPs were as silent as the sound of falling carbon emissions.

Ministry monitoring efforts were insufficient and have provided no positive resolution for residents. At the meeting, affected parties were told that the ministry is going to start taking a more aggressive role in dealing with the emissions. People rightfully want to know why the McGuinty government hasn't always taken an aggressive role with industries that don't follow environmental rules. They generally believe, and I agree, that there's too much talk from the McGuinty Ministry of the Environment and not enough—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

GO TRANSIT STATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's Lisgar day in the Legislature today. When northwest Mississauga's rapid growth began in the late 1980s, we were served by just one GO train station: Meadowvale. Since then, some 110,000 people have moved into Lisgar and Churchill Meadows, me among them, and others have commuted to our area from Georgetown, Brampton and Halton Hills.

We needed another GO train station between Meadowvale and Milton years ago. Getting it was my first priority once elected. Our city councillor Pat Saito, whom I have to praise, originally began this quest in the early 1990s, but she had the door slammed on her by the two governments that preceded ours. Working together, Pat and I showed that two governments can work together and get things done.

The city helped GO acquire the land and get it rezoned. Our government put a new GO train station at Lisgar into its plans in 2005. Last Friday, I hosted transportation minister Donna Cansfield, Councillor Saito, GO and GTTA dignitaries and the Lisgar Residents' Association for the official groundbreaking of the new Lisgar GO train station located where Argentia Road meets Tenth Line.

We're going to get a new GO train station in 2007 in the summer. We'll be able to take 900 cars off the road, park them at Lisgar, get on the train and get downtown. That was a promise made and a promise kept.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): The Women's Rural Resource Centre in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex is delighted to be a part of the province's Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign. Neighbours, Friends and Families is based on the growing knowledge that the warning signs of women abuse are recognizable and people can call for intervention before these women are further injured or die at the hands of their abuser. This campaign is another part of the McGuinty government's \$68-million domestic violence action plan.

Family violence was the secret that rural families avoided discussing during the farm crisis in the 1980s. No one spoke about the potential of abuse, even the neighbours, friends and families who suspected it. We all knew the story of the woman who hid in the ditches as her abuser hunted for her and her children, afraid that she would be seen from his pickup, as she tried to escape a situation that no one else wanted to acknowledge.

Violence issues specific to rural areas started to be identified by rural women's groups, things such as a lack of emergency housing close to home, no transportation and a lack of a 1-800 line so that victims could call for help without having to be identified to the abuser by the month's phone bill.

We now have rural shelters coordinated by groups like the Women's Rural Resource Centre in Strathroy, but

more needs to be done. The code of silence is coming to an end in rural Ontario, but everyone needs to be involved, and that is why programs like Neighbours, Friends and Families are so important to us.

ONTARIO GREENHOUSE ALLIANCE

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): The Ontario Greenhouse Alliance, a group consisting of Ontario's vegetable, flower and pepper growers and making up the second-largest agricultural industry in Ontario, is at Queen's Park today in the members' east gallery.

The alliance, located here in Ontario, represents the largest cluster of greenhouse production in North America. In the ridings of Essex and Chatham-Kent-Essex, greenhouse growers make a significant contribution to our economy and our rural communities. As this sector grows, so do other industries in our ridings like trucking, packaging and warehousing.

In Essex county and Chatham-Kent, as well as the Niagara Peninsula, the greenhouse sector produces well in excess of \$300 million of crops, and the almost 1,000 greenhouses in the Leamington and Kingsville area account for over 80% of the total number of greenhouses in Ontario.

Together, greenhouse operations in Ontario are responsible for over 35,000 direct and indirect jobs, bringing substantial benefit to our rural economies, like that in Essex. For every dollar of greenhouse activity, the economy as a whole experiences output impacts of \$2.81. With the farmgate value of the Ontario greenhouse industry for 2004 estimated at \$1.1 billion, the total economic impact is \$3.9 billion. The industry is also a strong contributor to the province's annual exports.

I welcome the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance to Queen's Park today and remind all members to stop by the legislative dining room this afternoon, meet some of the members and pick up a beautiful greenhouse poinsettia.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I beg leave to present a report on agencies, boards and commissions, The Liquor Control Board of Ontario, from the standing committee on government agencies and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mrs. Munro: This report is the first of six to be presented. The committee has undertaken a review of six government agencies. This review today reflects the deputations made to the committee and the consequent recommendations made by the committee.

I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on regulations and private bills regarding Bill 124, clause-by-clause and public hearings. I want to thank the staff and the clerks for helping me get through my first government bill as Chair. I now move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Ms. Horwath from the standing committee on regulations and private bills presents the committee's report as follows, and moves its adoption:

Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 124, An Act to provide for fair registration practices in Ontario's regulated professions / Projet de loi 124, Loi prévoyant des pratiques d'inscription équitables dans les professions réglementées de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

OUTDOOR HERITAGE DAY IN ONTARIO ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE JOUR DU PATRIMOINE DE PLEIN AIR EN ONTARIO

Mr. Parsons moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 170, An Act to name the last Saturday in September in each year Outdoor Heritage Day in Ontario / Projet de loi 170, Loi désignant le dernier samedi de septembre de chaque année Jour du patrimoine de plein air en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): Ontario is the envy of the world in terms of our rich supply of natural resources. Ontarians have access to hunting, fishing, observing wildlife, boating, canoeing, spending time at the cottage, hiking, camping or enjoying winter activities such as skiing, snowshoeing or snowmobiling. However, as our province becomes increasingly urbanized, I see an opportunity for all Ontarians to be reminded of the many rich blessings we have.

To accomplish this, this bill, if passed, will establish the last Saturday of each September as Ontario Heritage Day.

MOTIONS

CONSIDERATION OF BILL Pr29

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting the notice requirement of a certain private bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that standing order 87 concerning notice of committee hearings be waived with respect to consideration of Bill Pr29, An Act respecting Sheena's Place, by the standing committee on regulations and private bills on Wednesday, December 13, 2006.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Monday, December 11, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 260. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1354 to 1359.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Amott, Ted	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Arthurs, Wayne	Hardeman, Ernie	Pupatello, Sandra
Bartolucci, Rick	Hoy, Pat	Racco, Mario G.
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Klees, Frank	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Kular, Kuldip	Runciman, Robert W.
Brownell, Jim	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Matthews, Deborah	Sterling, Norman W.
Chudleigh, Ted	Mauro, Bill	Tascona, Joseph N.
Colle, Mike	McGuinity, Dalton	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Miller, Norm	Wilkinson, John
Di Cocco, Caroline	Milloy, John	Wilson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol	Witmer, Elizabeth
Duguid, Brad	Munro, Julia	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John
Dunlop, Garfield	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David
Elliott, Christine	Patten, Richard	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles
DiNovo, Cheri
Horwath, Andrea
Kormos, Peter

Marchese, Rosario
Martel, Shelley
Murdoch, Bill
Ouellette, Jerry J.

Prue, Michael
Tabuns, Peter

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 64; the nays are 10.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

RECHERCHE ET INNOVATION

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I rise today in my role as Minister of Research and Innovation to proudly share with the members of this House our government's next steps to further strengthen Ontario's economy through innovation.

To state the obvious, Ontario's future success will be shaped by our ability to compete and win in the global marketplace. And in that marketplace, speed counts for a lot, because in today's global economy it is no longer just about the big overtaking the small. More and more it's about the fast overtaking the slow.

Nous voulons que notre province fonce en avant : que l'Ontario soit rapide quand il s'agit d'engendrer de nouvelles idées, rapide quand vient le moment de les transformer en biens et services qui susciteront une forte demande, et rapide à bénéficier des bons emplois et de la qualité de vie élevée qui en découlent.

In short, we want a fast Ontario, an Ontario that is fast to generate new ideas, fast to convert those ideas into highly sought-after goods and services and fast to benefit with good jobs and a high quality of life.

Human beings are the only species blessed with the power of imagination. We are all born with creativity, and never has it been more important to Ontario that we harness the power of Ontarians to imagine and create. Tapping into the creative potential of Ontarians and building a stronger, more innovative economy means we're going to need a plan to get us there.

Earlier this year, I asked my ministry to help me develop a strategic plan to position Ontario as an innovation leader. Today I am presenting our strategic plan for consultation with stakeholders across the province. In crafting this plan, we consulted with researchers, industry, the private sector, academic institutions and other government ministries. Their advice reflects a comprehensive understanding of the importance of innovation and our collective desire to enhance its positive impact on Ontario. I appreciate their support and guidance.

I especially wish to thank the Ontario Research and Innovation Council, under the capable leadership of Dr. Adam Chowanec, and whom I would ask members to recognize for his good work, as he is in the gallery today.

I must say that the members of the Ontario Research and Innovation Council, a group of exceptionally talented and accomplished Ontarians who are working for the province as volunteers, are individuals who have helped me a great deal, through their careful deliberations and sound advice, on how Ontario can create an environment that is both innovation-focused and commerce-friendly.

Our plan demonstrates our commitment to creating that environment in Ontario so that individuals, businesses and organizations have the tools they need to transform creative ideas into economic advantages.

Our plan has some very clear goals. Ontario will be the preferred location to grow knowledge-based businesses. Ontario will attract the best and brightest scientists and innovators from around the world with R&D excellence and efficient commercialization. Ontario will attract increased private sector investment in R&D, becoming a leader in the rapid introduction and adoption of innovative products. Ontario will produce the highly qualified workforce an innovation-based economy demands. Finally, the Ontario government will lead by example, with integrated and coordinated innovation initiatives across all ministries and a culture of innovation in our own operations.

We want our strategic plan to be truly representative of the needs and desires of the people of Ontario. To ensure this, we will conduct a series of public consultations in every region of our province over the next few months. I've asked my parliamentary assistant, John Wilkinson, and my deputy minister, Dr. Alastair Glass, to lead these consultations. I encourage all members of this Legislature and anyone with a keen interest in our future prosperity to visit our website at www.ontario.ca/innovation to read our draft plan, find out how to participate in consultations and give us their best advice.

L'innovation est une condition sine qua non si nous voulons bâtir une économie plus vigoureuse et plus compétitive.

Quand nous y parvenons, quand nous créons des emplois ici grâce à des idées d'ici, la population ontarienne profite des avantages que procurent de bons emplois, des possibilités professionnelles stimulantes et des collectivités plus dynamiques.

Innovation is key to growing a stronger, more competitive economy. When we succeed at that, when we create homegrown jobs from homegrown ideas, then the people of Ontario enjoy the benefits through good jobs, rewarding work and stronger communities.

PROGRAMME D'APPRENTISSAGE POUR LES JEUNES DE L'ONTARIO ONTARIO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

L'hon. Christopher Bentley (ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités): L'école secondaire est pour les jeunes la période de la vie où ils

prennent des décisions importantes pour leur avenir. Certains décident d'aller à l'université, d'autres aux collèges et d'autres d'apprendre un métier spécialisé, et d'autres encore quittent, malheureusement, l'école sans avoir obtenu leur diplôme.

The McGuinty government wants to help all Ontario students reach their potential. Of course, it's harder to do that if you drop out. Over 70% of all new jobs require some form of post-secondary education or enhanced skills training, so one of the main things we're doing as a government, thanks in large part to the hard work of my colleague the Honourable Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, is trying to help more of Ontario's students graduate from high school. In fact, we've set a goal of 85% of students graduating by 2010-11. That's a significant increase over the 68% who graduated in 2003-04.

At the same time, building a skilled workforce is one of the main elements of the McGuinty government's economic plan. Ontario can't compete on the basis of cheap oil, and we don't want to compete on the basis of cheap labour. To succeed in a competitive global marketplace, our economy needs a steady supply of skilled and experienced workers. That's why the McGuinty government has set an ambitious goal of increasing the number of new apprenticeship registrations to 26,000 by 2007-08, and we're currently on track to meet that target.

1410

Today I'm pleased to announce the latest milestone to show the progress of the McGuinty government in meeting both of our goals: more high school graduates and more apprentices. The Ontario youth apprenticeship program is the route to meeting those goals. OYAP lets students in grades 11 and 12 earn co-op credits through work placements in the skilled trades. In some cases, employers may formally register students as apprentices while still in high school. This means OYAP students can graduate with their high school diploma plus part of their apprenticeship already completed, giving them experience, direction and a great head start on building a new career.

OYAP has always been a successful program, but today I can announce that the program has reached a new high. A record 24,000 students are expected to take part in OYAP in 2006-07; this is almost double the number of participants in 2002-03. More than 19,000 employers participated in the program as well last year. What this means is that our investment of \$8.25 million in OYAP is producing better results every year, in part because we've been refining the program to make it even better.

Today I visited the automotive technology classroom at Waterdown District High School, where I was joined by my colleague the member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot, Ted McMeekin. We met students who are getting hands-on experience through OYAP by first learning how to repair vehicles in the automotive technology classroom and then going on to get on-the-job training from employers who partner with the school and provide co-op placements through OYAP.

Many of these students go on to apprenticeships, and some may even start their own businesses. All of them come away with skills they can use throughout their lives.

Our government is helping to boost the skilled trades in other ways as well. We introduced the apprenticeship training tax credit to encourage employers to hire and train apprentices in certain skilled trades. We've got the apprenticeship scholarship and employer signing bonus as well. And just a couple of weeks ago, I announced that the McGuinty government is providing opportunities for 800 students in the pre-apprenticeship program. Again, they'll qualify for skilled trades training. Of course, there's Employment Ontario, our new integrated training and employment network which brings together all of Ontario's training and employment and skills services.

For today's students, this is a great time to be entering the skilled trades. Demand is high and will grow even more as large numbers reach retirement age and make room for the next generation of skilled workers.

Our government knows that when we invest in programs like OYAP, we benefit everyone: students, their hard-working families and the economy as a whole. We're working to ensure everyone in Ontario has the tools they need to prosper in the economy of the 21st century.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): On the Premier's statement concerning a strategic plan for research and innovation in Ontario, what I find most interesting is this Premier's tendency to say anything to get elected. Now, on the eve of an election year, three years after getting elected, the Premier finally comes up with a strategic plan for research and innovation in Ontario.

We haven't heard from the Premier on this issue before now, and while he stands in the House today touting his plan for research and innovation, his backroom wheeler-dealers are in the process of closing the doors on a unique and invaluable research institute in Guelph. The Turfgrass Institute has a proud history of supporting the turfgrass industry, researching economic potentials of turfgrass and developing innovative techniques to grow and improve this industry. Now the Ontario Realty Corp. is going to sell off this valuable institute to a developer for housing. Apparently, in this case, supporting research and innovation is not what this government is interested in doing. I might add that the turfgrass industry is very upset at this very unfortunate turn of events.

One has to wonder what the real strategy is here, Premier. Is it going to be just to say anything to get elected? It is, after all, this government's policies of broken promises, high costs and high taxes that most hinder investment and success in Ontario?

We hear the hollow words of the goals that this government has planned. The Premier says that Ontario will

be the preferred location to grow knowledge-based businesses. How are you going to do that, Premier, when you're closing research centres? "Ontario will attract the best and the brightest scientists and innovators from around the world"? How are you going to do that, Premier, when you're closing research centres? "Ontario will attract increased private sector investment in R&D." How are you going to do that, Premier, when you're closing research centres?

Ontario will produce a highly qualified workforce. Premier, you can't do that when you're closing research centres in Guelph.

ONTARIO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has a lot of gall this week to talk about the Ontario youth apprenticeship program. Last week, there were several young people sitting in the gallery above him, not 20 feet away from him, with their potential employers. They came here with the Ontario Electrical League to ask him to change the journeyman-to-apprentice ratios in the electrical sector. He's out of sync with his ratios with every other province and territory.

Many of these young people went through the Ontario youth apprenticeship program only to find out there was no apprenticeship position for them because the minister is in the pockets of the unions and he won't change the ratios to allow a one-to-one ratio all the way through the system.

The apprentices were here last week with their potential employers. Those people all took time off work. They were small mom-and-pop shops that want to hire apprentices.

There seems to be a pattern around here. Every time we raise something on this side of the House, they do a re-announcement. This thing has been announced six or seven times and he did it again today. We talk about real jobs, real people, real employees who need jobs.

You've lost 113,000 manufacturing jobs in the last two years alone. In the last two weeks in Collingwood, Alcoa has said that it's going to lay off 330 people. Where's the jobs plan that this Legislature asked you for over a year ago? Magna is laying off over 3,000 workers; Canadian General-Tower, 35 employees in Cambridge; Alcoa, as I said, in Collingwood, 330 jobs; a bankrupt Kingston biotechnology company, Millenium Biologix Corp., 20 employees going; 800 employees laid off at Sterling Trucks in St. Thomas; International Truck in Chatham, 640 employees. In the last two weeks alone, Freightliner LLC has announced it will eliminate 800 jobs in its St. Thomas plant. Navistar is also laying off 700 people at its heavy truck plant in Chatham. In Prescott, 32 people will be out of work at Siegwirk Ink; 108 people in Hanover at Hanover-Hearth Cabinets; Tembec, of course, 229 employees in the last two weeks;

Ford Motor Co. in Oakville, 215 workers laid off in the last two weeks. The list goes on and on and on.

Where are you going? You should be ashamed of yourself. Get back here and bring in the jobs plan that this Parliament asked for over a year ago. Stop re-announcing stuff that doesn't need to be announced and start creating jobs for those young apprentices who were here last week.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Member for Davenport.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I want to respond to the Premier's statement today. It's interesting that whenever the McGuinty government is confronted with a problem, their response is to promise that something will happen some time down the road, after the next election. The reality is, Ontario is confronted with a massive loss of manufacturing jobs. Almost weekly, hundreds, if not thousands, of workers are losing their jobs.

What is the McGuinty government's response? I think we heard it today. It's not an action plan, it's a consultation plan. They're going to go out and consult with people. I hope the McGuinty government does go to Thunder Bay and consults with the thousands of forest sector workers who lost their jobs not as a result of the world forest products market somehow winding up, but because the McGuinty government is forcing mills that are surrounded by hydro dams where electricity can be produced for one or two cents a kilowatt hour to pay six or seven cents a kilowatt hour for that electricity. The McGuinty government has destroyed those jobs. So I hope you go to Thunder Bay and consult, but while you're there, let me tell you that you'd better have something more than just promises that something might happen after the next election.

1420

The reality is that under this government, auto parts jobs are being lost virtually every day, and the auto parts sector is a place where Ontario used to have a technological edge. Do you know what would be really innovative? To make some investments to ensure that we maintain that technological edge. But what's happening here? The McGuinty government is going to consult.

The mining industry is in fact a knowledge-based sector. Every day, new techniques, new technologies, new alloys and new uses are being created. What's the sterling thing that has happened in the mining sector under the McGuinty government in Ontario? The two largest mining companies, Inco and Falconbridge, were sold, lock, stock and barrel, and the McGuinty government didn't even whimper, didn't utter a word. Now, if you want to talk about the future of the mining sector in Ontario, you have to fly to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil or

you have to go to Switzerland. That is the big achievement of the McGuinty government in that sector.

I simply point out again, wouldn't it be innovative if the McGuinty government recognized that pulp mills and paper mills that are surrounded by hydro dams in northern Ontario, that produce some of the lowest-cost electricity in the world, should be able to take advantage of that nature-given benefit rather than penalizing those mills and those companies? That would be real innovation.

ONTARIO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Mr. Bentley's announcement reminds me of late-night TV reruns, which are usually bad. I was expecting another website and, lo and behold we have, as the member from Simcoe-Grey mentioned, another reannouncement of a program that, yes, we support, but it's not new, it's hardly revolutionary and it's hardly original.

If you are a big supporter of co-op programs, as some of us are, why do you present Bill 52, which essentially privatizes a whole lot of programs that are going to be offered by outside institutions, that will not be taught by teachers, and there's no guarantee of that? The government clearly wants to save money. As a result, they will have non-teachers teaching these programs outside of the school system, and they will be, yes, contracted out and privatized. So we'd remind teachers that many of your jobs will be lost, no doubt about it. Many students will be heading out to have these programs where they're going to get 40 hours of instruction, not 110 hours of instruction, where the quality is not assured, where you will not be assured of a teacher and where the programs will be privatized. That's the intent.

We support co-op programs, but I suspect that these are the same co-op programs that are about to be contracted out by this government. That's what we're going to see.

VISITORS

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I want to welcome to the Legislature the class of Jennifer McCreary, from Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School, who are in the east visitors' gallery. They're down in Toronto for the day.

DOUGLAS FORD

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes to remember a former member of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): It's with a great deal of privilege that I speak on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus and our leader, John Tory, to pay our respects to the life of Douglas Ford, who was a member of this Legislature from 1995 to 1999 for Etobicoke-Humber. Doug died on December 22, at the age of 73, from cancer, which had been diagnosed only three months earlier. His family is devastated by the loss of Doug, who was truly the patriarch of his family.

We are joined in the galleries today by his wife, Diane, and three of his children: Randy, Douglas and Rob. His daughter Kathryn was not able to be here with us today. Also here today are six of his eight grandchildren and his former executive assistant, Sherri Walker.

Doug led an extraordinary life, truly a rags-to-riches story. As the youngest of 10 children of a single mom, he was forced to leave school after grade 3 to help support his family and himself. As a young man, he was a significant athlete, playing for the East York Argos and swimming alongside Marilyn Bell when she completed her first crossing of Lake Ontario. As his son Rob said, "He never got across, but he sure made a good attempt."

When Doug met Diane, he said, "Marry me and you will be marrying a millionaire." Well, it came true, but it wasn't quite that easy. In 1962, with four young children, Doug started his own company, leaving a steady job, which became known as Deco Labels and Tags. Through hard work, determination and skill, the company grew and grew and prospered to the point where this company now employs over 150 people in Toronto and Chicago. His sons Doug and Randy now operate that company.

Prior to entering the Legislature in 1995, Doug worked in his community with the Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal, Big Brothers and many groups related to the special needs of children and seniors. He was an active member of the Rotary Club for 38 years and was recognized as a Paul Harris Fellow, an honour given for outstanding community leadership. Mr. Ford was a long-time member of the Etobicoke General Hospital board, once raising \$1.5 million for the hospital's first CT scan machine.

Mr. Ford extended his charitable ways further when he became an MPP. It is a little known fact that Doug Ford, while he was an MPP here, gave all of his salary as an MPP to charity over that elected period of time. I don't know if any other MPP in this Legislature has ever done that.

Doug came to Queen's Park to represent and help his constituents. His motto in business and then in politics was service: "Meet them at the front door." In order to gain access on behalf of his constituents, Doug innovated and used some of his business techniques in order to represent his constituents. My wife, who was working for Al Palladini at the time as his MPP liaison, said she was surprised to receive an invitation from a brand new MPP, Doug Ford, for lunch, as all other MPP liaisons had, because Doug wanted to tell them about Etobicoke-Humber and wanted to gain access to all the ministers'

offices on behalf of his constituents. I'm told that he dealt with ministry staff and bureaucrats in a businesslike fashion in order to gain the best possible outcome for his constituents.

If we look at his career at Queen's Park, his focus was on (1) his constituents, (2) economy in government and (3) small business enterprises. He repeatedly rose in this House to announce the opening or expansion of a small business in his Etobicoke constituency. His interest in striving for efficiency was put to good use on the Government Task Force on Agencies, Boards and Commissions. He had a resolution in this House that dealt with the misuse of health cards. Surprisingly, it still hasn't been completely dealt with, as we found out from the Auditor General's report last week.

Doug was a true-blue conservative, and there was no question about that. In order to get where he did, he was very direct, he was very outspoken; there were no punches pulled with Doug Ford. When he spoke to caucus, he was listened to. In fact, in one instance, his intervention put an end to a government bill because he saw through the fallacies of that particular bill. He was here in this Legislature at every vote for his governing party. He could always be counted on.

Doug believed in loyalty to the end: to his family particularly, to his business associates, to his clients, to his customers, to his workers, to his political party and to his community.

While Doug appeared a little rough on the outside from time to time, he was quite thoughtful in his actions as an MPP. He was very knowledgeable about business issues and a very, very successful investor. His history shows his heart was very big, and indeed he was one of the most generous people who have ever come to this Legislature. He had a great sense of humour, always ready with a good story.

On behalf of my party, I say to his family and friends: I know that you will miss him very, very much. He not only was a great father and a friend, but a great man for his community and for our province of Ontario. You have indeed every right to be very, very proud of his life.

1430

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): On behalf of New Democrats, I want to join in this opportunity that we have to say a few words in regards to the work that Doug did while he was here.

Most of what had to be said has already been said by my colleague who was formerly within his caucus, but I want to take this from a bit of a different perspective. He's gone through the accomplishments that he had; he's gone through the various things that he had done in his life, like his volunteer work. I want to take it from a bit of a different perspective, and that is to say that, yes, it's true: Doug was his own person. He really came to this place bringing his own style of politics, believing keenly in what he was about and what he was trying to do. One thing that was never in doubt is that he really knew where he wanted to go in the time that he was here.

I remember at first—being a member elected in 1990 and having been defeated by the Harris government—

feeling a little bit stung by some of the things that Doug would sometimes say in this place when we were participating in debate. But I began to understand why he was the way he was. He was a person who came from nowhere; he was a person who basically had nothing at the beginning of his life. He had a lot of hardship as a young man. I remember talking to him about the fondness he had for his mother and the work that his mother, along with the rest of the family members, did in order to stick together in very difficult times and in a very difficult economic situation, and him having to go to work at a very young age.

The thing that struck me was that, even though he might be a Conservative and I might be a New Democrat, at the end of the day we were kind of trying to go to the same thing, but in a different way. He believed very keenly in the empowerment of individuals. Basically, his whole life was trying to do well for himself and his family, eventually starting a business that was very successful, but when he got the opportunity to accumulate those successes by way of either cash or of time, he gave his own time and his own money back to his community in ways that a lot of us are not able to do and don't have the opportunity to do. I didn't know that he had given up his salary in the time that he was here; that's something that is really unheard of. For him to do that, I think, speaks volumes of his want to be able to give back to society what he got from society in the first place.

Also, when you look at the volunteer work that he did on behalf of his community, it was clear that he felt, as something really inside, that at the end he had been quite fortunate in this society and he had to find some way to give back to those who had helped him and to help those he may have never met to have an opportunity to hopefully succeed in the way that he did.

The other thing I would say about him is that he had a particular interest in trying to find ways of making government work in a way that he saw as more businesslike. I remember being on committee with him a couple of times when we were dealing with agencies, boards and commissions and looking at issues about the mandates of these committees and what were some of the regulations that were in place. He came at it from a very different perspective than most and looked at it more from the business side. That's not to say that's always right, but I respected him and his view.

I think that when members are able to come here—and this is the important part—and not forget who they are once they walk in the door, but remain true to themselves and to their constituents, I think that says volumes about them.

On behalf of New Democrats, we say to the family that we know it's a difficult thing. Some of us have lost parents before. I've lost my father and I understand how difficult that is. I just say to you: You have lots to be proud of when you look at the work that your father did, not only in this House but throughout his life and for your family. I look at all of you and say, he's done a pretty good job. Congratulations.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): On behalf of the government members, I would like to pay tribute. It's a privilege for me to pay tribute to Doug Ford this afternoon. I remember Doug very vividly, as most of us would, particularly when he was exercised about some issue that was before the Legislature. Doug always let you know where he stood on an issue—there were no questions about it—and he brought a very practical sense to the Legislature.

His own business experience and, I think, his own life experience were brought out clearly whenever he was in cabinet or in his speeches in the House and, I'm sure, in the government caucus meetings, where other parties don't have a chance to be. What my friend Norm Sterling said about him was probably very true: that on many occasions when there was legislation or a regulatory initiative brought forward of which he was aware, he would be the first one to try to apply his business acumen and his common sense to those kinds of proposals. He was also noted, as those of us around here knew, as a very good constituency person. Again, as a colleague in the then government caucus, Norm Sterling would know exactly what he brought to the caucus in terms of that acumen.

When a person is born into wealth and does very well, we're happy for them. For Doug Ford, who was not born into wealth but had to struggle and had to go to the school of hard knocks with his education—we certainly admire a person who does that. That kind of individual always remembers what it was like back in the old days, when that person had so many challenges to meet in a personal way. For Doug to overcome those challenges sets a good example for many who find themselves in similar circumstances.

In terms of his contribution to committees, there has been reference made to that by the member for Timmins–James Bay. He was active at committees. Some people go to committees and they have more interest than others. I think it could be said of Doug that when he was in committee, he again was prepared to apply his business principles and analyses to whatever a committee happened to be doing.

All parties and all party leaders certainly respect and like loyalty. It could be said of Doug that he was loyal to the cause of what was referred to as the Common Sense Revolution, to Mike Harris, and to the members of the cabinet and the caucus at that time.

He came in at a very interesting time in Ontario. Some significant changes were being made. I can picture him now dealing with government agencies which were in existence, because that's one area where, over the years, we have not had the kind of analysis that perhaps other jurisdictions had. We're back into that now, I must say: looking at government agencies and how they operate. Doug would see the deficiencies and strengths of those agencies and was prepared to share his views not only with the members of the opposition who were in the committee but I'm sure behind the closed doors of a

caucus meeting and in personal conversations with ministers of the day. It was appropriate that Premier Harris would appoint him to review those government agencies.

I had heard that he was an excellent athlete. A lot of the things that we learn of individuals, unfortunately, we learn when we're paying tribute to them, when people are reviewing their lives. I understood that Doug was very interested in the field of athletics and was himself an athlete, and there's something to be said of that.

Sometimes people draw up a picture of a businessman who's hard-hearted and tough with everybody. That's a misnomer for so many. Doug was yet another example of a person who had gone through a lot himself, was a very astute business person, who in his own business applied those appropriate principles but had a heart of gold for others. The fact that he was involved with the Salvation Army, with Big Brothers and with Etobicoke General Hospital is a clear indication of his commitment to his community, giving back what others had helped to provide for him and wanting to serve his constituents, the people of Etobicoke and really the whole province of Ontario. So we all pay tribute to him.

We say to the family, who are assembled here today, that we were all sorry to hear of his passing. But the family can take satisfaction and pride in the fact that he made a wonderful contribution to this Legislature, to the riding of Etobicoke–Humber and, of course, to the province of Ontario.

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The Speaker: I'd like to thank the member for Lanark–Carleton, the member for Timmins–James Bay and the government House leader for their remarks. I assure the family that I will see that the Hansard of today's proceedings is sent to you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. I'm asking this question of the Premier because, as the head of the government, he bears the ultimate responsibility for all things that happen in the broader public sector.

On Friday, Tom Parkinson, the CEO of Hydro One, quit under a cloud. He handed in his resignation. At the same time, we heard that he took this decision despite the fact that the board of directors at Hydro One had full confidence in him. After that, we heard that he would be given a severance package in the range of \$3 million.

My question is this: If he did indeed quit and it was his decision, why are we paying him \$3 million in severance?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): There's some good news for the people of Ontario when it comes to what has been

happening at Hydro One and to our broader public sector generally, including agencies like OPG and Hydro One.

There are three points in particular I want to make. First of all, there's a government today in power that has expanded the freedom of information legislation to allow access to Hydro One and OPG, expanded the salary disclosure sunshine list to Hydro One and OPG, and opened up the books of OPG and Hydro One to the Auditor General. That's point number one. Point number two: The Auditor General has in fact looked at Hydro One. Thirdly, the board at Hydro One has agreed to implement each and every one of his recommendations.

Those are the kinds of things that would never have—and, in fact, never did take place under previous governments. We're proud of the fact that we've opened this up to the light of day, that we received some solid advice from the auditor and that the board will in fact act on all of that advice.

Mr. Tory: I don't know how the Premier can claim to have any commitment to transparency or respect for taxpayers' money whatsoever when he utterly fails to answer the question that I asked, which was a very simple question: If the man quit under a cloud and the board didn't want him to quit, why did you pay him \$3 million?

In the vast majority of cases, the idea that somehow an individual can quit his or her job, completely leave the company and still receive the equivalent of two years' salary is an idea that just doesn't make sense to most people in Ontario. In the real world, if you quit under a cloud and you leave completely, you quit; no \$3 million. In Dalton McGuinty's world, you leave under a cloud, \$50,000 in expenses are paid through a secretary's credit card and you get rewarded with a payout.

If the Premier is serious, as he said in the past, about changing the culture of entitlement, can he tell us why he didn't seize the first opportunity to say to Mr. Parkinson when he quit, "Sorry. You quit under a cloud. Your decision. No payout"? Why didn't you say that to him?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I want to assure the leader of the official opposition, the people of Ontario and hydro ratepayers particularly that the very best advice we got was that this was the least expensive resolution we could find in order to address this matter. I know that the leader of the official opposition, in his heart of hearts, knows that and understands that, notwithstanding the thrust of his question.

On a go-forward basis with respect to a successor who'll eventually be hired on to replace Mr. Parkinson, there's a balance here that we're trying to strike on behalf of the people of Ontario and ratepayers. On the one hand, we understand that Hydro One is a very sophisticated organization, and we're going to be looking for an exceptionally talented individual to head up that organization. But at the same time we will ask that that individual respect the fact that this is a public utility and ultimately we are all accountable to the people of Ontario and the ratepayers.

Mr. Tory: I guess when the Premier tries to describe this as the less expensive option, certainly, compared to

the millions and millions and millions of taxpayers' money that his government has blown, it starts to look less expensive.

In the last two weeks we've seen story after story of hundreds more people in Ontario losing their jobs. Last week: St. Thomas—900 layoffs; Collingwood—330 jobs lost; Magna International, we now hear—3,000 people laid off. In all of these and dozens of other examples, hard-working Ontarians lost their jobs through circumstances beyond their control. Thousands in the north have lost their jobs.

Compare this to the case of Tom Parkinson, who quits under a cloud and gets a \$3-million windfall. If he quit, as the Premier and the Minister of Energy and the board of directors at Hydro One all claim, why is he getting a huge, multi-year, multi-million-dollar payout when he has left the company completely at the same time as all these other Ontarians are just getting a pink slip? Why is that happening?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I think it's important for us to understand how we got to this point in the first place. We have opened up OPG and Hydro One by way of expanded freedom of information legislation, by expanding the salary disclosure sunshine list, and asking the Auditor General—in fact, giving the Auditor General the necessary authority to take a look at the books of OPG and Hydro One and the activities of all the individuals working there. That's how we have this information: because we did something that the previous governments had refused to do. They didn't want to take a close look there. They were afraid of what they might find there. We think it's important that the people of Ontario have access to that kind of information, and that's why we said that they should and could have that information.

Again, I say to the people of Ontario that there are reasons to be hopeful. We have a government that believes in accountability and transparency. Secondly, we have an Auditor General who took advantage of every opportunity and looked at what was happening at Hydro One. Thirdly, we've got a board at Hydro One that is saying it will act on every single one of those recommendations put forward by the Auditor General.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question? Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: My question, again, is to the Premier. The scapegoating of Tom Parkinson by the government doesn't change the fact that there are serious systemic—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Government House leader. Stop the clock. Order.

Try again: New question.

Mr. Tory: By trying to focus, of course, all the attention on Mr. Parkinson, it will take attention away from the fact that there are many things going on systemically across the rest of the government. It goes much further than Hydro One.

At OPG, we have serious questions raised by the Auditor General about the misuse of corporate credit cards: \$61 million spent on three types of cards; \$6.5 mil-

lion of \$30 million paid without any receipts whatsoever. Mr. Parkinson's resignation doesn't change any of this.

We see late word—literally in the last 15 minutes—that they're taking some steps at OPG to deal with this. But you, I say to the Premier, are ultimately in charge, the man entrusted with the responsibility to safeguard the taxpayers' money. What specifically have you done and said in terms of specific action plans that will be undertaken in the broader public sector—school boards, hydro corporations and so on—to make sure this kind of unacceptable practice doesn't continue one more day? What have you done?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The single most important thing that could have been done and was in fact done was to open these doors to the Auditor General so that he could take a look inside for the very first time. That was something that the previous governments refused to do. They kept a lock on those doors.

There were over a dozen specific recommendations offered by the Auditor General to the folks at Hydro One, outlining in some very specific ways the kinds of things that they should do in order to ensure that they're being more accountable when it comes to the money they receive from Hydro One ratepayers. Those specific recommendations have been acknowledged by the folks at Hydro One through the board. They have specifically said that they will adopt these recommendations, that they will put them in place.

To listen to the leader of the official opposition now is a little bit like hearing about the courage of the general who rides down from the hills after the battle's over so he can shoot the wounded. Where was he when it was time to open these doors—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Supplementary.

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Mr. Tory: The fact is that if you open the door and then pay absolutely no attention to what you see and allow this scandalous abuse of the taxpayers' money to continue, you've accomplished absolutely nothing by opening that door.

My question, in fact, was about OPG, not Hydro One. Here's more of what the auditor had to say about that: "OPG policy prohibits the use of ... credit cards for the purchase of minor fixed assets....We noted that" corporate "cards were ... used to purchase minor fixed assets such as computer printers, monitors, fax machines, digital cameras, projectors, and computer scanners." OPG relied on their employees to report these and record these, but again, according to the auditor, "None of the assets sampled that cost more than \$2,000 had been recorded in the fixed-asset system." Computer printers, digital cameras, projectors, scanners—all paid for with ratepayers' and taxpayers' money, all purchased improperly and all unaccounted for.

You opened the door, but specifically, now that we've seen the horror shows going on inside, what are you going to do? What have you instructed be done to show some respect for taxpayers' money?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I again say to the leader of the official opposition that you're too late. That is a party that while in power refused, after repeated requests over a number of years from the Auditor General, from the relevant parliamentary committee, to provide the necessary authority to the Auditor General so that we could get him to take a look at OPG, to take a look at Hydro One. Now he tells us that he's unhappy with the findings. Well, you know what? He should have taken a look at that before.

We too have some real problems with the findings, but we at least we had the courage of our convictions. We said to the Auditor General, "Please go take a look at what's happening there. Give us your very specific recommendations." He's made recommendations to the folks at Hydro One and he's made recommendations to the folks at OPG. My understanding is that a relevant letter has been issued today by Mr. Hankinson, following hard on the heels of those recommendations from the Auditor General. We are going to move ahead, not like the previous party, which insisted on keeping those doors locked to the Auditor General of Ontario.

Mr. Tory: The fact of the matter is that you can open the doors all you want, but if you do nothing when you look inside and see the horror shows of the abuse and the waste of taxpayers' money going on on your watch—it is absolutely inexcusable that you refuse to do anything.

The auditor also identified ways in which oversight and accountability could be exercised that had led to other improper spending. He cited a monthly credit card purchasing report that identifies employees who have overspent their limits. It's not considered important, obviously. He cites people who have a \$200,000-a-month spending limit on their corporate credit card. What specific directions has the Premier given to say that the days of entitlement at places like OPG and Hydro One are over, and that there will no longer be such a thing as a \$200,000-a-month credit card that somebody can charge to the taxpayers or the ratepayers? Specifically, what have you done about that?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think the question that Ontarians would be interested in having answered is, why was it that the previous party was so eager to hide that kind of information from the people of Ontario? Why were they afraid to bring that information forward? Why were they afraid to make those kinds of interesting pieces of information public?

We decided that Ontarians, in fact, have a right to that information. That's why we changed the law in Ontario. That's why we said to the Auditor General, "You have every right to go in now and take a look at OPG, Hydro One, children's aid societies, colleges, universities and hospitals. Open up those doors; we have unlocked them. Go inside and take a good look around. Tell us exactly what is happening there, come forward with some very specific recommendations, and let us work together to act on those."

I think at the end of the day what the people of Ontario really want to know is, who stands for real transparency

and real accountability, and who stood for keeping the locks on those doors and keeping that information away from the people of Ontario?

The Speaker: New question?

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is to the Premier. On Friday, the McGuinty government's Minister of Energy couldn't utter the words, "Tom Parkinson's \$3-million severance package." Why? Because he was embarrassed. At a time when the McGuinty government should have been giving Mr. Parkinson the pink slip for his greed and excess at Hydro One, the McGuinty government instead handed Mr. Parkinson the keys to the company safe.

My question is this: At a time when thousands of workers across Ontario are losing their jobs because of skyrocketing hydro rates, at a time when hydro consumers across the province are having a hard time paying their hydro bills, how does the McGuinty government justify a \$3-million golden parachute for Tom Parkinson?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): Again, to re-emphasize: First of all, it was this government that brought about the ability for the Auditor General to look at these issues, and, indeed, what his findings have been require a full response. This government has acted prudently and in a timely fashion to address the issues in consultation with the board of Hydro One. Moving forward, we want to ensure that the recommendations of the Provincial Auditor are fully implemented. I can assure the House that in fact many of the recommendations contained in the auditor's report have already been acted on, prior to the release of the auditor's report.

On the advice of the board and others, it was felt, as the Premier indicated, that this was the least costly resolution to the circumstances we found ourselves in. Under such circumstances, we believe it's important to implement all of the auditor's recommendations and to continue to shine the light on all of these broader—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: I don't know what fantasy land the McGuinty government is living in, but this is Hydro One's filing, which had to be filed at the end of 2005, which disclosed all this. You didn't disclose anything that wasn't on the record. The \$125,000 mansion subsidy—that's in here. The \$1.6-million compensation package—that's in here. And then there were the hydro helicopter joyrides, and then the \$45,000 in hidden expenses on the secretary's credit card and now a \$3-million golden parachute for someone who exhibited his greed and his excess for all of Ontario to see. And you approved all this. You approved the renegotiation of this contract. In fact, you told this Legislature it was all justified.

My question to the Premier, again: How could you sign such an outrageous pay package and turn your back on hard-working Ontarians who are having a hard time paying the hydro bill?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government has responded to the full range of energy issues with respect to Hydro One

and OPG. The issues that were raised by the auditor were not in fact subject to any kind of public scrutiny before, and that's why we brought it about. We're responding in a proactive and timely fashion in a way that is responsible to those ratepayers and taxpayers who deserve the very best. Accordingly, a number of recommendations have already been acted on. The advice we had on this particular issue was that this was the least costly response to the circumstances in their entirety. Accordingly, the board proceeded as they did, and now we proceed to implement the rest of the recommendations by the Provincial Auditor at OPG, at Hydro One and indeed across the broader public sector.

Mr. Hampton: You haven't done anything to protect hydro consumers or people across Ontario. In 2003, Mr. Parkinson was getting paid about \$1 million. What the McGuinty government did was approve his salary and bonuses going up to in excess of \$1.6 million. And you approved this outrageous pay package should he be terminated or quit. That's what you've done. You haven't protected the hydro consumers. You haven't protected the public interest at all. You've contributed to this excess.

What's clear is this: There is much more going on both at Hydro One and OPG and the Ontario Power Authority; there are all kinds of people who are on the Dalton McGuinty "Let's increase the pay" gravy train. The only way people across Ontario are going to be protected is if we have a public inquiry that looks at the whole of the pay packages. Is the McGuinty government willing to order a public inquiry so the public can—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We allowed the auditor to go in and look at every aspect. He has done that, provided a series of recommendations, all of which will be responded to.

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The good news here is that the auditor can go in and find these things. The good news is that we have a government that has already responded, not in full yet but certainly on recommendation by recommendation. The good news is that, going forward, we have the opportunity to address these and other issues in a way that they were never looked at before, over the course of governments of all political parties, in a way that will help prevent the challenges that were spotted this time. Moving forward, the steps we'll take to fully implement the auditor's recommendations will be appropriate, timely and done in the interests of all ratepayers and taxpayers in Ontario.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, the only thing the McGuinty government has done is escalate not only Tom Parkinson's salary through the roof, but if you look at all of the other people you've put in charge of the Ontario Power Authority or the Independent Electricity System Operator or OPG, you've escalated all of their salaries through the roof.

It seemed that you were trying to hide behind the Hydro board last week. This, of course, is the Hydro board that hired Tom Parkinson, negotiating Mr. Parkinson's outrageous compensation package that you then agreed to, and then proclaimed its full and ongoing confidence in Mr. Parkinson, while he walked out the door with \$3 million of public money.

If the McGuinty government has the same old board that's taking the same old approach at Hydro One, how are you going to stop this revolving door of greedy chief executive officers at Hydro One?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: There have been a number of chief executive officers at Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One and indeed the predecessor, Ontario Hydro. There have been challenges with these organizations throughout the years. Different governments have taken different approaches to deal with them. Accordingly, we gave the Provincial Auditor the power to go in and do these kinds of analyses, to make the kinds of recommendations that the Provincial Auditor is doing, something that was never done before. So, accordingly we take those recommendations seriously. We will work with the boards and all the various organizations affected to implement all of the auditor's recommendations, and, moving forward, to ensure that the kinds of issues that have been identified are dealt with in a timely and prudent fashion, recognizing that the continued operations of both large energy companies continue to be stable, continue to produce electricity and bring it to market.

Mr. Hampton: The McGuinty government wants to continue with its fiction. The outrageous pay scales were all provided according to a public filing that Hydro One had to file over a year ago. You've been defending those salaries and the board of directors over at Hydro One has been defending those pay packages. In fact, the board is unrepentant in its support of Tom Parkinson. While it accepted his resignation, it said it had the greatest of admiration for him. It shows no sign that it will do anything to change the culture of entitlement over at Hydro One.

When a hockey team overpays a lazy player and the team tanks, the owner doesn't just cut the player; they also fire the general manager. My question is this: Will the Premier fire Hydro One's board and replace them with people who have some respect for the hard-pressed hydro consumers in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The ongoing operations of Hydro One have become increasingly profitable; indeed, have experienced a number of credit rating increases. The board was presented with recommendations from the Provincial Auditor with respect to value for money that involved a number of aspects of the operation, all of which have been enumerated. Those recommendations are being acted on in the context of a company that must continue to be able to provide service that should have some stability at the board level. The government routinely makes changes at the board as terms expire and so on. That has occurred in the past. I anticipate that it will occur again in the future.

We have to ensure that the kinds of challenges the Provincial Auditor has identified and made recommendations on are dealt with in a timely fashion. We have to ensure that the company itself continues to see improvements in its credit ratings, because that benefits—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: The \$3-million golden parachute to Tom Parkinson has nothing to do with the Provincial Auditor and has everything to do with the negligence of the McGuinty government, a McGuinty government that should have handed him a pink slip but instead opened the door to the vault for him.

Here's the reality: You won't call a public inquiry to look at all of the escalating pay that's happening at Hydro One and OPG and the Ontario Power Authority and the Ontario Energy Board. You won't do that. You won't fire the Hydro One board which recommended these ridiculous pay scales and bonuses and perks and mortgage subsidies. This is all Dalton McGuinty's operation. This can't be blamed on somebody who came before; this has all happened under your government. So I want to ask the Premier this question: At what time does Dalton McGuinty take some responsibility for the mess that the McGuinty government has created? The McGuinty government alone approved these pay scales and everything else that went with them.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We began to take action when we took office. Whether you're talking about the situation at OPG and the board changes there or whether you're talking about bringing the Provincial Auditor in and giving him the ability to look at a value-for-money basis and a range of these options, a range of these challenges, that is about taking options. I remind you that when we looked for expense receipts in the past, we found 18 months of the chair's expenses that were missing, not even there. Those are the sorts of circumstances that couldn't go on.

The auditor has given us a number of recommendations. It is clear, as the Premier said this morning and has indicated before, that we must take into account all of these recommendations, not only with respect to the specifics but also with respect to governance and how we move forward. This government is committed to moving forward in what I would term a prudent, responsible and timely fashion to ensure that the kinds of situations that have been identified don't happen again, to ensure that the public trust of Ontario Hydro is maintained, and that, going forward, both OPG and Hydro One can act and operate—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Premier, this past Friday marked one year since this House adopted a resolution calling on the McGuinty Liberals to recognize "that a detailed government initiative is needed now to deal with ... communities, families and working men and women who are suffering from ... rapid economic changes, and

that this plan should come forward immediately.” That motion was adopted 44 to 0. Thirty-one members of the McGuinty government voted in favour of the motion. Yet 368 days later, we have no such detailed initiative or any comprehensive initiative at all.

Last week we had 900 layoffs in St. Thomas. We have 330 jobs lost in Collingwood. We have 3,000 jobs now lost by Magna International and a prediction of 5,000 more jobs to be lost in the auto parts sector.

For 368 days, the Premier has rejected the call of this Legislature for a comprehensive plan on jobs. Will the Premier tell this House whether he has any intention at all of bringing forward a comprehensive plan to help these people and these families with their lost jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): Let me set the record straight right now. First of all, Magna is not laying off 3,000 jobs; let me say that very clearly. It's very unfair for you to spread more erroneous rumours through this House.

Second, let me give you an example. When there have been these issues in communities across this province, the Ontario government has acted immediately, and it has been an across-the-government response. Whether that is through the employment centres with our Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities or whether it's been through the agriculture ministry, depending on the size of the community, our government has acted. We have swooped into that community and offered every single possible assistance for those workers who are being displaced with the means to look at retraining, new opportunities, and establishing and—

Interjections.

1510

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I was unable to hear the last comments of the minister. It's necessary that members allow other members or ministers to respond.

Minister, you have about 15 seconds left.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Let me just say this: The communities that are being affected by changes in this economy know that this government is a partner with them to move them through to a brighter future. We have been there and we will continue to be there.

Mr. Tory: The source, confirmed by someone at Magna, of there having been job losses at Magna was the Toronto Star, and a Magna spokesperson said that there have been layoffs. So if you don't want to accept those 3,000 layoffs, there still have been 2,125 layoffs, 2,125 families who have lost their jobs in this province on your watch, and you just dismiss it.

The fact is, the Premier has called this a little bit of contraction, he has called it cyclical—he even, one day, called it inevitable—but the fact is, there have been 13 separate media reports that could total as many as 5,125 job losses. Ontario is bleeding jobs and the government is

ignoring the call from this Legislature for a comprehensive plan at the very same time they reward someone like Tom Parkinson, who's leaving under a cloud with a \$3-million payout. The contrast is stark. The Parkinson cheque was written in a hurry on a Friday afternoon; it has taken you a year so far, and still no jobs planned. When are we going to see the jobs plan? If it took you an hour to write a cheque for \$3 million, surely you can come forward with some kind of a plan instead of this disgraceful inaction.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I know that this opposition party has a hard time believing that there are net new jobs in Ontario. While you don't want to admit that, let me share with you something that you continue to do, and that is to vote against every single opportunity that you've had to support our innovative strategy for the automotive sector. You were opposed. For the advanced manufacturing investment strategy: You were opposed. For all of the help to the forestry sector, you were opposed. For all of agriculture, you were opposed. Every time we have come forward with a significant package to the tune that these industries have never seen, and for the first time in 15 years this government works with a partner in a—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I need to remind members that I need to be able to hear when members place questions and ministers respond.

Again there will be some time left for you, Minister.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Let me just finish by saying that this opposition party has been opposed to every single innovative idea that has brought jobs to this province—7,000 new jobs in the automotive sector alone. You don't want to acknowledge that kind of success, but 260,000 net new jobs—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: We can wait.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, if I hear from you again—order. There are members who wish to place questions.

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, under your watch, Tom Parkinson's take-home pay grew by half a million dollars. That was a 50% increase under your watch. With his golden handshake severance package, Tom Parkinson will have received a mind-boggling \$4.5 million this year. That works out to \$2,163 for every hour he worked. Meanwhile, the wages of Ontario's poorest citizens barely keep pace with inflation and leave them well below the poverty line. Mr. Premier, why did you pay Tom Parkinson \$2,163 an hour but you can't afford to pay Ontario's lowest-paid, hardest-working people \$10 an hour?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): This government has shone the light of scrutiny at Hydro One and OPG. It has received the recommendations of the Provincial Auditor and it has begun to address those issues. There are a number of challenges that remain outstanding that we must address as well.

I would remind the members that this is the government that has raised the minimum wage in Ontario. We raised the minimum wage four times. This is the government that provided \$100 million this fall that wound up in the hands of people of modest incomes to assist them with their energy bills. This is the government that has moved on a variety of fronts to assist those most in need, whether you're talking about affordable housing, minimum wage, welfare support or the 2% increase in this year's budget. None of us like to deal with the difficult situations the auditor dealt with. We shone the light on it. The good news is that we did, and we are addressing it.

Mr. Prue: I think perhaps the minister does not understand, sitting in that very rich seat over there. Ontario families struggle with two and three jobs just to lift themselves above the poverty line, and your government refuses to raise their wages to that poverty line. Meanwhile, the CEO of Hydro One gets \$3 million as a bonus for getting fired, and your government says that's okay. A single mother on minimum wage would have to work full-time for 188 years to make \$3 million.

Back to the Premier: How can you defend keeping Ontario's lowest-paid, hardest-working families in poverty while you allow Tom Parkinson to take hydro consumers for a ride?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): Unfortunately, for nine years in this province we saw no increase in minimum wage. We recognized, when we took office, that the Conservative Party had left vulnerable individuals far behind. We made a conscientious effort to move forward on a four-pronged approach to raise the minimum wage in this province to \$8 an hour. As of February 1, 2006, that rate has been at \$7.75 an hour; on February 1, 2007, that rate will be at \$8 an hour. We needed to make sure that we move forward in a fair and balanced approach.

You cite other jurisdictions. Our neighbours' minimum wage in the United States is \$5.15 an hour.

We have a very competitive minimum wage in place, and we felt it was important to recognize that, because we saw nine years of inaction by the Conservative government.

I'm proud of what we've done. We're going to see an additional 25-cent increase on February 1, 2007.

TOURISM

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): My question is for the Minister of Finance. I know the member for

Niagara Centre wants to hear this, because he's very worried about his winter holidays.

Minister, last week, as part of your discussion with the media about some economic initiatives to stimulate the Ontario economy, you discussed the government's hope that Ontarians would vacation in Ontario.

While discussing and reminding Ontarians that they should vacation and holiday in Ontario, you did say, "I understand that skiing in North Bay is not all that good." Minister, I grew up skiing in North Bay. As you know, Kate Pace was a World Cup champion who grew up in North Bay. Steve Omischl, a World Cup aerialist champion, just this weekend won the World Cup championship in China. North Bay has a proud skiing history and a very active ski club at Laurentian Ski Hill. In fact, we are one of the very few communities across the country that have a ski hill right in the centre of the city—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question's been asked. Order. Minister?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The part of the question that some of us didn't hear I think went something like, "How do you explain your comments?" Perhaps you could start with my own ignorance and then move quickly to my own stupidity. I think that would take care of most of it. I don't think we need to go much further than that.

1520

Last Thursday, we were in the midst of promoting Ontario as the destination of choice for Ontarians for their holidays. I had been talking about the skiing in Thunder Bay, the skiing in Collingwood and the cross-country skiing in the Kawarthas. I'm not a skier. I mentioned North Bay and then I didn't realize that there was downhill skiing in North Bay; thus the comment. Since that time I certainly have found out that one of the greatest places in the entire province to ski is right in North Bay.

Ms. Smith: As the minister knows, Discovery North Bay is a new museum in downtown North Bay that we've refurbished in the old CP station. Our waterfront is being—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. This won't surprise you, but I'm having a great deal of difficulty hearing the member for Nipissing. I need to be able to hear her place her question.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Member for Nipissing.

Ms. Smith: They're just so excited about the travel opportunities in the north that they can't contain themselves over there.

During the winter months, North Bay and area are home to some of the best skiing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and ice fishing in the country. Our government has invested in the Nordic ski trails and our Laurentian ski club through the Trillium Foundation and

the communities in action fund and we are encouraging our young people to get more active through these activities.

I've signed the minister up at Laurentian Ski Hill for some ski lessons or snowboarding lessons this winter. I'm asking him: Will he and Kate and the kids come up and join me for some skiing in North Bay this winter?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I'm going to take a pass on the skiing. I should tell you, however, that there was a good side to this blooper. I've been talking about the great skiing in North Bay on regional radio. I had a conversation with Doug Newell, who actually owns Laurentian Ski Hill in North Bay, and I've made an undertaking to promote skiing in North Bay just about as long as the season will last.

Might I just say one thing, in all seriousness, on North Bay? Mostly I've been there in the summertime. It's a community which has so many things that are attractive and that people should see if they want a holiday—for example, in the springtime, walking along Lake Nipissing. I understand from my friend that there is a magnificent hand-carved merry-go-round. What I really want to do this spring is get my grandchildren up there to enjoy that.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My question is for the Premier. Premier, this is a terrible and devastating time for over 300 million insulin users worldwide who are alive today because of the work of Sir Frederick Banting. In the galleries today are many supporters and family members of Sir Frederick who are wondering why you haven't lifted a finger to save Dr. Banting's birthplace.

Premier, with the stroke of a pen you could have saved the Alliston farm where this great Canadian was born and where he performed some of his earliest experiments. Instead, you let the Ontario Historical Society sell the property from right under the noses of the Banting family. Because of your weak leadership, the Banting farm is now going to be turned into a subdivision.

I ask you, Premier, given that the homestead was apparently sold four or five months ago, when did your government first know about the sale and how can you have the audacity to continue to provide public funds to the Ontario Historical Society given what they have done to Sir Frederick Banting's legacy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Culture.

Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture): First of all, I'd like to note that, as you know, the Ontario Historical Society is a non-profit organization. It is not a government agency. Nonetheless, we appointed a facilitator to help craft a community-based solution, because the ultimate solution had to be found locally.

The Ontario Historical Society made a determination to sell the property to a private developer and not to the municipality. Having said that, the town of New Tecum-

seth passed a resolution recently declaring the intent to designate 70 acres as a homestead. It is a local solution that has been found, and if New Tecumseth passes the resolution, it will be protected under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Mr. Wilson: Boy, are you ever out of touch. It's been sold, Minister. We found out two weeks ago. The developer says in the local paper that he doesn't know what the big fuss is, that he bought it four or five months ago. It's sold. It's being made into a 300-home subdivision.

I first raised this issue in this place two years ago when we realized that the Ontario Historical Society had no intention of properly maintaining the Banting homestead, let alone turning it into a diabetic camp for youth, as Edward Banting wanted. I've introduced thousands and thousands of petitions into this House, and yet you've let down every one of the people who signed those petitions. You've let down the Banting family, the people of New Tecumseth and over 300 million insulin users worldwide. Dr. Banting sold the rights to insulin to the University of Toronto for \$1. Eighty years later, the only one to profit from his discovery is the Ontario Historical Society, to the tune of \$2.2 million.

Dr. Banting's birthplace has been sold. You did nothing. With the stroke of a pen, through cabinet, you could have frozen that property. Why don't you use the \$3 million you're giving the CEO of Hydro One and save this great Canadian's birthplace?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Member for Ottawa Centre will come to order.

The Minister of Culture.

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: The original homestead was demolished in 1920; the original homestead is not there. Nonetheless, the town of New Tecumseth passed a resolution to declare its intent to designate those 70 acres.

The Ontario Historical Society, which owns the property, is a non-profit organization, not a government agency. Having said that, it is my understanding that the new agreement will protect the heritage features of the building, allowing repairs to take place, and will of course maintain the legacy of Dr. Banting. The legacy of Dr. Banting is being maintained across this province, including in London, Ontario, where he conducted most of his experiments throughout his lifetime. We will continue to play a role so that a local solution—

The Speaker: Thank you.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): A question to the Premier. While Tom Parkinson pockets \$3 million in severance, thousands of honest workers in this province are losing their jobs in the manufacturing sector. Your sky-high hydro rates cost us 4,000 of those jobs in November alone. Now we learn from the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association that they expect another 5,000 jobs lost in this sector, in addition to the 10,000 good-paying jobs already lost. Can you explain to

these workers why Tom Parkinson hit the \$3-million jackpot while all they're getting are pink slips?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): May I say to the member opposite that I did have a very good meeting last week with manufacturers being feted by the chamber in the Welland area, which gave me an opportunity to meet them and speak to them directly about the challenges that Ontario faces and that the world faces in the manufacturing sector and what role we are playing and intend to continue to play in the manufacturing sector. In particular, I referenced the success that our government has had in moving the automotive sector to a higher, more innovative level, to the tune of 7,000 new jobs coming here to this jurisdiction. Second, I referenced the advanced manufacturing investment strategy—again, looking at that next tier of suppliers, many of whom are in this very member opposite's own riding—to look at how we can partner with them to move them up in the level of innovation and be ready for the next generation of manufacturing that we insist be here and grow in this province.

1530

Mr. Kormos: Premier, you sat on your hands while Tom Parkinson boosted hydro costs and boosted his salary. Meanwhile, across Ontario, 136,000 workers have lost their jobs in the broader manufacturing sector. This double standard is another sign of how completely out of touch this government is with working families. Haun Drop Forge, Welland: 30 workers with up to 30 years seniority gone. Workers at GDX auto parts manufacturing, Welland, seeing their jobs traded off and contracted out to low-wage, non-union subcontractors.

Premier, tell us: How do you justify giving \$3 million to a man who quit, who ripped off Ontario hydro consumers, while thousands of workers lose their jobs in this province and get nothing?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I'd like to tell this member opposite in particular how proud I was to have five companies from the Niagara region alone participate with our 30 groups who came to Alberta to look at how their manufacturing processes can be applied to the oil and gas sector.

We are doing everything we can to move aggressively, to look for opportunities for our manufacturing sector. How delighted I have been to see that some of those companies, mere weeks after that trip, have already started to move on orders for what they've achieved in their new relationships in Alberta, including these manufacturing companies in the Welland area in the Niagara region.

It's important that this government play the role that we're playing to make our province investment-ready through infrastructure investments to the tune of \$30 billion, with programming where we're prepared to partner with companies to move them to a higher level of

innovation. This is the largest manufacturing sector in North America, second only to California. We intend—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. The day I turned 16 some 20 or more years ago, I was sitting on the curb at the licence bureau waiting for it to open so I could get what was then called my beginner's licence. I will acknowledge that I've driven many, many miles during the winter season in my lifetime. I'll even confess that on a few occasions many, many years ago I slightly exceeded the posted speed limit at that time. As a result, I got to experience the joy of digging out a car or walking for help.

Minister, with the holiday season approaching, more and more Ontarians will be travelling across the province's highways to celebrate and visit with friends and relatives. Unfortunately, we risk freezing temperatures and snow, which can lead to less than optimal road conditions. Minister, what would you recommend to motorists and passengers as they travel during this holiday season?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'd like to thank the member. He has been a strong advocate for safety, in particular for safety for children.

One of the most important things we can do if we drive is to just look at the weather conditions and ensure that our cars are in good condition and that we drive according to the conditions on the road. When there's black ice, there's black ice, but probably one of the most important things that we can do is ensure that we have an emergency kit in our car. At this season, if you're thinking about giving a gift, because there are a lot of people on the roads for their holidays, think about the gift of an emergency kit. That is a really important thing to do because you never—

Mr. John Yakubuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Riveting stuff.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: It is riveting, actually. This is one of the things that's really important, because in fact it may save your life. It may save the life of a child. It may save the lives of people going to visit their relatives in the holiday season. So it isn't something to be taken lightly. It isn't frivolous. It is something to be taken—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Parsons: I'm pleased to see you mention the new seat belt legislation; I applaud you for it. I suspect every member of this Legislature could name someone whose life has been saved by wearing a seat belt in this province.

However, as we've seen in the past, some drivers still don't get the message to make responsible decisions when driving over the holiday season. We hear over and

over again horror stories about how drinking and driving destroys lives and families and futures. My question is, Minister, what is your ministry doing to discourage drinking and driving over the holidays?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: The most important thing that we can do is to ensure that we get the education out there. If you drink, don't drive. If you're going to go out and have an opportunity to be with friends and family and you're going to drink, simply do not get in your car. Do not drive. You have RIDE programs, you have Red Nose programs, you have taxis, and in large urban areas you can have public transit: GO trains, CN trains. There is a variety of ways. You can have the designated driver.

The fact remains that speed kills, drinking kills; don't do both of them. It makes such an incredible difference in the lives of the people you leave behind and the lives, of course, of the people you impact.

The other thing is, on a first-time driving offence, if you drive and drink, with no previous record, it's going to cost you up to \$20,000. That's the cost of your insurance; that's the cost of your fine; that's the cost of an interlock program; that's the cost of maybe never getting your driver's licence back, ever again.

The other thing is, simply do not speed. Speed kills. It's really quite simple.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): My question is for the Minister of Government Services. The Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals, the Ontario Catholic Cemetery Conference, Toronto Hebrew Memorial Park, the Ontario Municipal Cemetery Working Group and the Consumers' Council of Canada have joined the 1,700 not-for-profit cemeteries in fighting a new property tax to be imposed by the McGuinty government as part of Bill 152.

Minister, why did the McGuinty government break its word by imposing this new tax on not-for-profit cemeteries? If they go bankrupt, municipal taxpayers will end up picking up the bill.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): The background on this, by the way, is the bereavement sector, which is the cemeteries and the funeral homes, and we've been working on this—two governments—for five years. There's agreement on 31 issues. There's one issue where there's not agreement, and that is, should non-profit cemeteries that build a funeral home be subject to property tax or not? The independent funeral home operators would say that they should be, to level the playing field.

We've looked at this now for some considerable period of time. The independent funeral homes I think have a point, that if they're going to be competing against a non-profit cemetery that builds a funeral home on the cemetery, that funeral home—just the funeral home—should be subject to property tax. I think, on balance, they've got a point.

So I say that on 31 of the 32 recommendations, everybody is in agreement. On that particular one we now have made a decision that, to level the playing field, if they're going to build a funeral home, they should be subject to property tax.

Mr. Tascona: Minister, you broke your word. You said everything was completely status quo, and you know today you were told that the non-profits will be taxed on all their commercial activities within the cemetery—not just the funeral home; all of them. You never knew that until today. Will the minister commit today to pulling schedule D from Bill 152 so that good-faith negotiations and not any more backdoor political manoeuvring can be held within the funeral and cemetery industry to ensure fair and equitable consumer legislation?

Hon. Mr. Phillips: Actually, you proposed the amendment that was virtually the same as the one that was passed. I think that all three parties were looking to find a way so that the independent funeral homes were on a level playing field. There is one small issue where I think there's some misunderstanding by some of the non-profit cemeteries. If they're selling what they call monuments and markers today, they're not going to be taxed.

Again, I would just say to all of us, we're all in agreement on 31 out of 32 recommendations. One issue: Should a funeral home that's built on a non-profit cemetery to compete against other funeral homes be subject to property tax or not? We've made the decision that, for a level playing field, they should be. I actually, on balance, think that's the right decision, and it will allow the industry now to move forward with 31 of the 32 recommendations in agreement—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question is to the Premier. Workers at Grant Forest Products' OSB mill in Timmins have been locked out now since December 10. Now we find out that Grant Forest Products has decided to cut the disability payment to those workers who are off because of illness. A simple question: What are you prepared to do to assist those workers to make sure they don't lose a benefit that they're entitled to?

1540

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I've certainly been aware of the labour dispute at Grant Forest Products. I appreciate the member bringing this new information to me today. I'm not aware of this situation. That's maybe something that the Minister of Labour might have a comment on. I'll certainly wait for his other question to see if I can be helpful, or the minister or whomever, but we'll certainly get back to the member.

Mr. Bisson: It's a pretty direct issue, and it affects a lot of workers up at the Grant waferboard mill. It's simple: They got ill before the lockout. Through no fault of their own, there is a lockout that's going on at this point, and now Grant waferboard has decided to pull their benefits. When the workers talked to me this weekend yet again, they were saying, "How could it be that Tom Parkinson can get a \$3-million package when it comes to assisting him out the door after he was found doing what he was last week—putting expenses on his secretary's credit card—and workers who are entitled to a benefit aren't even able to get their sick plan?"

So my question is, are you prepared to step in and intervene and make sure that these workers get better treatment—at least treatment as good as Mr. Parkinson got?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I'll refer that to the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): We're very proud of the track record we've had in the province of Ontario of seeing 97% of all negotiations successfully completed. As the member knows, the Ministry of Labour has staff who are available to assist at times when called on, and the Ministry of Labour staff are certainly available to assist those parties. Again, we certainly would, as always, encourage both sides to resolve their issues at the table. That is where good collective bargaining takes place. While I'm not in a position to talk about the specific issue, if the member has some information that he would like to have forwarded to my staff, I'll see that it is sent to the appropriate individuals.

PETITIONS

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): As I've mentioned many times in this chamber, there is a great need for a new public secondary school in south Nepean. Therefore:

"Whereas Longfields and Davidson Heights in south Nepean are some of the fastest-growing communities in Ottawa and Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board has voted to authorize the final design phases for a grade 7 to 12 school to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario has lifted a three-year moratorium on school closings in order to make way for new educational facilities;

"We, residents of Nepean–Carleton, petition the Parliament of Ontario to ensure that the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board continues with plans to build a new grade 7 to 12 school no later than autumn of 2008 to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities."

Thank you very much for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I support wholeheartedly this petition. Therefore, I'll present it to page Or.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that's been sent to me by members of SEIU. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, in June 2003, Dalton McGuinty said Ontario Liberals are committed to ensuring that nursing home residents receive more personal care each day and will reinstate minimum standards, and inspectors will be required to audit the staff-to-resident ratios; and

"Whereas Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, in October 2004, said that the Ontario government will not set a specified number of care hours nursing home residents are to receive each day; and

"Whereas Ontario nursing home residents still receive the lowest number of care hours in the Western world; and

"Whereas studies have indicated nursing home residents should receive at least 4.1 hours of nursing care per day; and

"Whereas a coroner's jury in April 2005 recommended the Ontario government establish a minimum number of care hours nursing home residents must receive each day;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario immediately enact a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of nursing care for each nursing home resident per day."

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I'd just ask members to take their private conversations out of here. I'm having a great deal of difficulty hearing the members read their petitions.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I have a petition here. It says:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the ... Ministry of Natural Resources ... plays a vital role in the protection and management of the natural resources that belong to all Ontarians; and

"Whereas MNR's budget for 2006-07 is 24% less, in real terms, than it was in 1992-93; and

"Whereas vital programs relating to fish and wildlife, provincial parks, forestry, and other MNR activities continue to be cut back; and

"Whereas the ... economic, educational, environmental, recreational, and social value of our natural resources far exceeds the cost of protecting and managing them;"

Therefore, be it resolved that "We, the undersigned," respectfully "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That funding of the Ministry of Natural Resources be increased to a level that will enable it to stop cutting existing programs and provide full funding to all existing programs as well as any new programs that may be required to ensure the effective protection and management of Ontario's natural resources."

I affix my signature in full support.

PENSION PLANS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the seniors of Ontario request full access and control of their locked-in pension funds at age 55, without the current restriction imposed by government regulation;

"Whereas the current government regulation restricts what seniors and pensioners are able to do with their own savings and limits their options for an affordable and comfortable retirement;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Pension Benefits Act be amended to give seniors of Ontario the option to transfer their locked-in pension funds (LIRA, LIF, LRIF) into an RRSP at the age of 55, as is the case for seniors in the province of Saskatchewan."

I sign this petition and send it to the table by way of page Andrew.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to present on behalf of my seatmate, the member

for Niagara Falls. It's a petition on access to trades and professions in Ontario. We thank Rick Hua Shi for having gathered the signatures. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

It's an excellent petition. I'm pleased to sign it and to ask page Colby to carry it for me.

CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I have a petition to present on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham which reads as follows:

"Whereas the Lung Association's women and COPD national report card 2006 reveals that more than 425,000 Canadian women have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and more than 4,300 will die of the disease this year; and

"Whereas since 2000, female mortality due to COPD has risen at double the rate of breast cancer, and more women are diagnosed annually with COPD than breast cancer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly support a call to action for early diagnosis and optimized management of COPD to reduce illness and suffering; and

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the Ontario Lung Association's COPD advisory panel report

to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on the prevention and management of COPD in Ontario; and

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario endorse a comprehensive strategy to address COPD in this province."

I'm pleased to sign it in support of this important and emerging risk to health.

1550

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas workplace harassment is linked to the murders of women in Ontario; and

"Whereas harassment needs to be defined as a violation of the Occupational Health and Safety Act so that it is dealt with as quickly and seriously by employers as other health and safety issues; and

"Whereas employers should have a legal obligation to deal with harassment; and

"Whereas harassment poisons the workplace, takes many forms—sexual and sexist, verbal, physical, intimidation and racist—and should not be tolerated; and

"Whereas harassment in any form harms a victim's physical and mental health, esteem and productivity, and contributes to trauma and stress on the job; and

"Whereas Bill 45 would make it the law to protect workers from workplace harassment by giving workers the right to refuse work after harassment has occurred, require an investigation of allegations of workplace-related harassment and oblige employers to take steps to prevent further occurrences of workplace-related harassment;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to treat workplace harassment as a serious health and safety issue by passing MPP Andrea Horwath's Bill 45, which would bring workplace harassment under the scope of the Occupational Health and Safety Act."

I agree with this and send it to the table by page Philip.

RURAL EDUCATION

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas rural education must be protected and re-established in rural communities to ensure quality of life to rural students equal to that of their urban counterparts;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To re-establish rural education services in the four communities of Kashabowie, Raith, Shebandowan and Kaministiquia at the four-way community school site. Rural students must have the same right to be educated in their own community, with the same advantages and

quality of education as urban children. Undue hardships have been placed on these children who live in rural areas through lack of sleep, study time and family time, and has put a great strain on these children, their education and their overall well-being."

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I've received more petitions to do with the Mary Lake dam pedestrian walkway. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition.

CHILD CARE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Danforth.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Davenport. Sorry about that.

The Deputy Speaker: Davenport. Danforth is another street.

Mr. Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, they sound very much alike, so I'm not unhappy with that.

This petition is addressed to Legislative Assembly of Ontario and reads as follows:

"Whereas the people of Ontario expect the government of Canada to honour existing agreements with the government of Ontario;

"Whereas provinces and territories negotiated agreements with the federal government to ensure Canadians would have access to early learning and child care programs that are high-quality, affordable, universally inclusive and developmental;

"Whereas parents in Ontario have demonstrated a high demand for greater access to high-quality early learning and child care programs;

"Whereas Ontario's early learning and child care agreement with the government of Canada would provide

Ontario families with at least 25,000 new high-quality, regulated child care spaces in the first three years;

"Whereas Ontario's early learning and child care agreement represents a \$1.9-billion investment over five years in high-quality early learning and child care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the government of Ontario in calling on the government of Canada to honour Ontario's early learning and child care agreement, for the sake of the thousands of Ontario families who would benefit from it."

I'm delighted to assign my signature to it.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey):

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada's first Nobel Prize recipient; and

"Whereas this great Canadian's original homestead, located in the town of New Tecumseth," Alliston, "is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

"Whereas the town of New Tecumseth, under the leadership of Mayor Mike MacEachern and former Mayor Larry Keogh, has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Culture and the Liberal government step in to ensure that the Banting homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come."

Of course, I agree with that petition.

TUITION

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I have a petition here signed by a number of people from, this time, the area just around Timmins, and it reads as follows:

"To Stop Tuition Fee Hikes and Improve Access and Quality In Post-Secondary Education

"Whereas the Ontario Liberal government cancelled the tuition fee freeze after only two years and approved fee increases of up to 36% over the next four years; and

"Whereas tuition fees in Ontario have increased by more than four times the rate of inflation over the past 15 years; and

"Whereas a majority of Ontarians oppose tuition fee increases and support greater public funding for colleges and universities; and

"Whereas improvements to student financial assistance are undermined by fee increases; and

"Whereas the Ontario government's recent increase to student loan limits is set to push student debt to approximately \$28,000 for a four-year program; and

"Whereas per-student investment in Ontario still lags significantly behind the vast majority of jurisdictions in North America;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to stop tuition fee hikes and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"—reduce tuition fees to 2004 levels for all students in Ontario and implement an immediate tuition fee freeze;

"—increase public funding for post-secondary education to promote access and quality;

"—expand access to financial aid in Ontario, especially for part-time students; and

"—double the number of upfront, need-based grants for Ontario students."

I sign the petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES CONSUMER PROTECTION AND SERVICE MODERNIZATION ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 DU MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES GOUVERNEMENTAUX SUR LA MODERNISATION DES SERVICES ET DE LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR

Mr. Phillips moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 152, An Act to modernize various Acts administered by or affecting the Ministry of Government Services / Projet de loi 152, Loi visant à moderniser diverses lois qui relèvent du ministère des Services gouvernementaux ou qui le touchent.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Minister Phillips, you have the floor.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, Mr. Vic Dhillon, the MPP for Brampton West–Mississauga.

I'm pleased to participate in the debate for third reading of Bill 152. It's a bill that builds on our Consumer Protection Act that we enacted last year to help provide protection for Ontario consumers. It strengthens consumer protection, modernizes the legal framework for businesses, ensures the safety of families and prepares government for the challenges and opportunities of the future, as part of our ongoing commitment to the people of the province.

We've been listening to the people, and from the very beginning, when this bill was first developed, we've been taking it to affected people, stakeholders, and the public, listening to their concerns and working with them to address their concerns. I would like to thank the members

of the opposition parties, particularly the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, Mr. Tascona, and the member from Niagara Centre, Mr. Kormos, who have worked hard in the Legislature and provided good input and co-operation.

Public hearings on this bill were held over several days in late November and early December, and we received some excellent feedback. This is an important piece of legislation, and we're taking action on a range of consumer issues. It addresses consumer protection and easy access to government services. We know that these are obviously issues of importance to the people of Ontario.

I would like to take some time now to review some of the elements of the bill. One of the most important items that's being addressed in this bill is an issue of real concern to the people of Ontario, particularly property owners, and that's real estate fraud.

1600

Recently, there's been increasing public concern about this issue of real estate fraud. Many of us heard the stories of people who have been victims of fraud and have been faced with responsibility for dealing with mortgages that they did not place on their property, mortgages placed by fraudsters, placed illegally and without the owner's consent. This is happening at a time when people are concerned about identity theft, identity fraud and security.

We've spent some considerable time here in the Legislature looking at this issue, and I've spent considerable time working with our stakeholders to help define the scope of the problem and to look at solutions. I would say to all of us that we know when a title on a property has been fraudulently transferred; we know that because we are responsible for restoring it. We've got a very good idea of the number of those cases. The number of those cases is about 10 a year, and it has not changed, actually, in the last little while. So it's about 10 title frauds a year in about two million transactions.

The bigger issue is the other part of real estate fraud, and that is mortgage fraud. That appears to be the area that is growing, where fraudsters will use a variety of techniques to perpetrate mortgage fraud.

While the cases of title fraud are relatively small, even one case, I think the public would tell us, is one too many. Consequently, it is up to us, the Legislature, to take action, and we're determined to do that.

If the legislation passes, it will ensure that strong measures are in place to combat real estate fraud, that ownership—and this is one of the most important aspects of this legislation—of a property cannot be lost as a result of the registration of a falsified mortgage, a fraudulent sale or a counterfeit power of attorney. In other words, the innocent homeowner's title will be restored and the fraudulent document will be nullified. This responds to a situation that many have heard of where a fraudulent mortgage has been registered against someone's title and they are being held responsible for that. This legislation will ensure both that the title is restored and that the fraudulent document is nullified.

We're also introducing new safeguards for suspending and revoking access to the electronic registration database so that suspected fraudsters cannot be allowed to register documents, thereby ensuring that others won't be victimized. This will give us the authority, where we have suspicion of a fraudster attempting to register a document, to either suspend or revoke their licence. We'll also raise the fines.

I've met, as I mentioned earlier, several times with a group of individuals who are very active in this whole area of real estate fraud, from the financial community, the banks, mortgage companies, the law society, our law enforcement agencies—a very good cross-section of people who are in one way or another knowledgeable about and participating in this whole area of real estate titles and mortgages. We've been getting some good advice from them.

As a result of the latest meeting, we've made a significant amendment to our legislation in committee. I think one of the major concerns was around the responsiveness of the land titles assurance fund. To use the jargon, you'll hear it referred to as LTAF, but it's the land titles assurance fund. I think it's fair to say that it has not been as responsive as we want it to be in the future. It's been seen as the fund of last resort. We want to change that. Particularly, as I said earlier in my remarks about being able to nullify a fraudulent title transfer and nullify fraudulent documents being registered against title, we want to find a way that our fund provides justice much more quickly.

So what we've said is that the standard now will be that you can go to the fund—provided, of course, you have sufficient evidence that a fraud has been committed, and that would probably be having gone to the police with this and whatnot—and within 60 days you will have a decision rendered. Within another 30 days, which is a total of 90 days, your title will be restored, and within another 30 days your money will be paid back. So that is a total of 120 days. It will become a fund that I think people can get to quickly, can get a decision out of quickly, and will deal with one of the most significant issues that I've run into on this whole issue of real estate fraud.

We've also had some comments from people saying, "What about people who already, a year or two years ago, have been caught up in the system?" I would say to that that essentially as soon as we get this set up, assuming the legislation passes, even people who may be in the system now from a year or two years ago can get into this expedited plan right away. We'll also publish guidelines and step-by-step instructions online so that this becomes a much more user-friendly fund.

We're also going to be more selective on who can transfer title. This is the language used in this area. It's the most significant process in this. That's where you actually will transfer ownership, title, from one individual to another individual. We're going to be much more restrictive on who can actually make that happen.

We're also proposing a new set of criteria for those who wish to register documents such as mortgages. That

will be a broader group, because a large number of people who are trained in the mortgage area will be able to have access to registering those documents. But they'll have to meet three kinds of standards. Clearly, we'll have to know who they are; they'll have to demonstrate financial solvency; and they'll have to have the appropriate professional qualifications. We want to tighten the system and further decrease the risk of fraud by making sure that registrants are professional, responsible and accountable.

Finally, we will work with our stakeholders to strengthen the current standards for dealing with powers of attorney. Our proposal would increase due diligence by requiring lawyers to closely examine power of attorney usage when dealing with real estate transactions. Whenever a power of attorney is used, the lawyer will be required to discuss it with their clients and provide a statement to that effect.

My experience in this area is that there are six parts of this proposal that we are moving forward with. I believe they are significant and are important and will go a long way toward dealing with real estate fraud. But at the same time, it would say to us that this is a process; we have to keep at this. In fact, the group that I mentioned will be meeting again within two months to review the progress we've made and to find further recommendations. Obviously, all of us want to eliminate real estate fraud totally, and that's our goal, and I hope that the steps we're taking here will go a long way toward that. We're not going to assume it can be completely solved, and we'll keep our group working.

1610

I wanted to talk about some other areas of consumer protection in Bill 152. There has been an explosion in the popularity and the use of gift cards. I think we are all aware of it. Any study will show that in the US I think it's now a \$70-billion industry. It has grown dramatically, particularly at this time of year.

What not everybody may be aware of is that probably about 80% of the gift cards that you would purchase have an expiry date on them. In other words, if you don't use it up, normally in 24 months, it expires. We feel that's not appropriate. We feel that you've essentially paid cash. You probably bought it in lieu of a present for someone. The expectation is that—you've paid \$50, \$100, \$200 for a gift card—that should be usable in the future. So we are introducing, as part of this legislation, authority to allow us to regulate the elimination of expiry dates on gift cards. I think this is a good piece of consumer legislation.

As part of our efforts to ensure that our liquor laws are updated, this piece of legislation provides several areas; I think I'll just touch on two. One is to increase the investigative and enforcement powers for the Alcohol and Gaming Commission. It will allow the Alcohol and Gaming Commission to not only investigate applicants but also those associated with applicants. Essentially we're taking our experience in the gaming industry and bringing it to our liquor licence industry, where these will be the powers that will help the AGCO ensure that, if

you're going to get a liquor licence, you are a legitimate business.

There is another part of the legislation designed to allow bars and restaurants to include additional areas of their premises as part of their licence. What that means really is that a bar will now be able to license its washrooms, so that individuals could take their drinks into the washroom. Date rape drugs are a serious issue, and this will allow those bars to license that area so that—it's almost always—a woman would be able to take her drink with her.

Another area of consumer protection here is the Electrical Safety Authority, ESA. Again, particularly at this time of year, with Christmas tree lights and whatnot, it reminds us of the need to strengthen our ability to ensure that only safe products get into people's homes. This will allow the ESA to seize and order removed unsafe products from the shelves. If they find the product has already been sold and is in a home, it allows the ESA to call for the manufacturer to notify the consumer that the product is unsafe and to fix it.

The legislation also is designed to help prohibit advertising for illegal Internet gaming websites in Ontario. As I think I've said here in the Legislature, our horse industry is our second-largest rural industry. It is being affected by this illegal activity. Our goal here is to ensure that businesses play by the rules.

In addition, there are measures in here to help deal with identity theft. We will be the first province to give consumers the right to have fraud alerts as part of their credit report. We will ensure that you can put the fraud alert on your credit report, that there will be an obligation of the credit agencies to notify anybody asking for your credit and, once someone has been notified of that, the requirement would be for them to do the necessary due diligence in granting credit.

In addition to strengthening consumer protection, the legislation also helps to modernize our government practices. Specifically, the Ontario Archives Act is being updated here. It's the first significant change to the Archives Act in 83 years. It will help to guarantee that our provincial heritage is preserved and accessible through the best methods available, including electronically and digitally. As you can imagine, with an increasing reliance on electronic means, it's important that our Archives Act be updated to reflect that.

We are also updating the province's business law framework to enable Ontario companies to continue to be competitive. I find, Mr. Speaker, that the pace of business is rapid and we, the Legislature, have to find a way that we can keep up with the pace of business in our legislative framework. So part of this legislation is to update and modernize our corporate and business laws for that reason.

It also enhances corporate governance, increases shareholder protection—a very important matter—and creates some cost-effectiveness.

If passed, the legislation will help to build Ontario's status as a leading corporate and commercial law juris-

diction in North America. It will help to harmonize the province's corporate and commercial legal framework with its federal counterpart, the Canada Business Corporations Act. The proposed amendments enjoy very broad stakeholder support from the business, legal and, importantly, shareholder advocacy communities.

Changes to the bereavement sector are relatively technical in nature, with one exception, and that's the key change around property tax. Reforms to the bereavement sector are needed to enhance consumer protection, provide a level playing field for all industry stakeholders and provide fair marketplace rules for businesses. Bill 152 makes necessary amendments to the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act to respond to stakeholder concerns and harmonize it.

I would say the one issue that has emerged has been the issue of property tax. It was raised here in the Legislature today, and as I said in the Legislature earlier, people are in agreement with 31 of the 32 recommendations. The one issue where it was, frankly, impossible to reach consensus was the issue of property tax payments for some organizations that would build a funeral home on a cemetery. If you are a funeral home that has no plans to do that and you are competing with them, you want to have a level playing field. Originally, the plan was that if it involved a religious organization, a municipality or a non-profit group, they wouldn't pay property tax. They would make a payment in lieu of property tax and use it for their care and maintenance fund. I think it's fair to say that independent funeral home directors, independent funeral home operators, did not have a problem with the religious organizations and the municipal organizations having that right. It is the non-profits where they felt that down the road they are going to be competing with them, some of them very major operators, and that if they are not required to pay property tax, it's an unlevel playing field.

Now, I would say that this has been debated, I say to my colleague Mr. Sterling, for at least five years, trying to get, to use the jargon, the bereavement sector all together on it.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): It's an issue that will bury you.

Hon. Mr. Phillips: It's an issue that will bury me, he says.

In the last few weeks we had this debate, with the independent funeral homes saying, "Listen, in our opinion, you should be taxing a non-profit that wants to build a funeral home on the property," and the non-profits saying, "No, we would argue we'll pay the payment in lieu and we'll use it for care and maintenance."

1620

My clear preference is that I'd like everybody to come to us with a consensus, but it's obvious on this one—as I said earlier, 31 of the 32, but on this one we couldn't get a consensus. So what do we do? Well, we could say, "Let's just take this part of the bill out. Forget about trying to proceed with bereavement and deal with everything else." Now, when you talk to the industry on that,

or the group, they say, "We spent five years getting this far. Let's get on with it." As I said, this morning I met with some people. I said, "Here's where I am: agreement on 31 of the 32 recommendations. We're down to one issue, property tax on somebody who wants to build a funeral home in a cemetery in the non-profit sector." Actually, the group this morning said, "You know, we may be talking 15 of these, but for our independent funeral homes, that's a big deal." That is who they've got to compete with.

There was one side issue raised this morning, and that was that they're worried about a small cemetery that may be selling markers right now: Will they be subject to property taxes? I said the intent was that we want to capture those that are going to be building funeral homes, so I think we can deal with that.

But as I say, in the end, do we keep trying to find a way that we get a consensus on all 32 recommendations—that may be another five years—or do we proceed with that one issue where we, the government, have to make a decision? I wish everybody could be completely onside on it, but sometimes you have to make the best judgment you can. As I say, it's down to, in my opinion, a very small issue.

My colleague and parliamentary assistant is going to speak, but there are some other parts of the bill that help us to ensure that we've got the authority to proceed with things we need to do.

Service Ontario: I do want to take advantage of the opportunity, when I talk about Service Ontario, just to talk about something that not everybody in the public may be aware of. About a year and a half ago, birth certificates were a challenge, because you would have to mail in; none of them were online. You had to fill in a form and mail it in. We said, "If we could get this online, maybe we could deal with the backlog and help the consumer." So we did that. About a year and a half ago, we began to move birth certificates online. Then about a year ago, just to demonstrate and to get people's interest in going online, we said, "You go online, apply for your birth certificate online, and if you don't get it delivered to your house in 15 business days, it's going to be free." That's not a bad way of telling the public, "We've got this system; why don't you try it?" Since then, we've had 294,000 online applications in just a little bit more than a year. Now about 75% of all of our applications are online. We've had, of the 294,000, 120 not delivered in the 15 days. So I didn't want to miss this opportunity to inform the Legislature that there's an example: Service Ontario, online birth certificates, 294,000 since we began the online; 120 refunds. As I always said, Pizza Pizza can't come close to that success rate.

I repeat, I appreciate the working relationship of all three parties in dealing with this bill, and I look forward to third reading debate continuing.

Mr. Vic Dhilon (Brampton West–Mississauga): It's a pleasure to speak in support of Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act.

Minister Phillips has done an excellent job of providing useful information about this bill and what it includes. He has explained how it would build on existing legislation and how important his proposed changes are for the people of Ontario.

As he mentioned, we received some very useful feedback on the bill during public hearings last month. As Minister Phillips has mentioned, this bill is part of the McGuinty government's continuing commitment to the people of this province. Through this legislation, our government is once again proving that we're on the side of Ontario families and Ontario businesses.

Last year, the McGuinty government put in place the most significant changes to Ontario's consumer protection laws in 30 years, changes that made Ontario a leader in consumer protection. It introduced a number of important requirements for businesses, including allowing a 10-day cooling-off period for certain contracts, prohibiting negative option billing, and requiring the delivery of goods or services within 30 days of the date specified in the contract.

Enacting the Consumer Protection Act was a significant step forward for consumers. It updated Ontario's consumer laws to reflect the province's dynamic marketplace. It also made Ontario a leader in consumer protection. We're proud of the work we've done thus far, but the marketplace is constantly evolving and increasingly demanding. As the marketplace changes, so too must the protections that consumers need. That's why at the heart of Bill 152 is the introduction of new consumer protection and consumer safety measures.

Real estate fraud is one of the key issues that this bill addresses. The people of this province work hard to make a house into a home. They deserve to know that their property is secure. While there are very few cases of real estate fraud in comparison to the number of transactions that occur each year in our province, it is an important issue to Ontarians and therefore an important issue to our government. That is why this legislation is designed to ensure that people don't lose ownership of their property due to the registration of a falsified mortgage, fraudulent sale or a counterfeit power of attorney.

As previously mentioned, this legislation will also introduce safeguards to suspend and revoke the accounts of suspected fraudsters so that they are unable to register documents, raise the fines for real state fraud related offences to \$50,000 from the current \$1,000, and strengthen our authority to allow for notification to property owners about any changes to their title or our land registration system.

In response to stakeholder consultations and public hearings, we have proposed some amendments to the Land Registration Reform Act and the Land Titles Act. The most substantive of these amendments would streamline the process for property owners to apply for compensation from the land titles assurance fund, commonly known as LTAF, and improve the transparency of the current process to suspend or revoke access to the electronic land registration system.

Some excellent ideas have come out of our work with the real estate committee. We also plan to make the land titles assurance fund easier to navigate and more responsive to victims of fraud, limit access for certain aspects of the land registration system, and change how power of attorney is used in real estate transactions.

This is an issue we're committed to addressing on a continuing basis, and the legislation in this bill is only one step in this ongoing process.

There are many other consumer protection elements in this bill, including gift cards. As Minister Phillips said, gift cards now form a multi-billion-dollar industry. Recently, Ontarians have been increasingly interested in purchasing gift cards without worrying about such things as expiry dates or the value of their gift card decreasing over time. People purchase these cards in good faith and they rightly expect that the purchase will retain its full value until it's redeemed. Ontario consumers deserve to get what they pay for. That's why, if passed, this legislation will give government the power to ban expiry dates on gift cards.

Last week, a meeting with gift card industry stakeholders was held. It was a productive session with great discussion and progress. We look forward to continuing to work with the industry to expeditiously finalize gift card details and regulations.

1630

The proposed legislation will also introduce reforms to Ontario's liquor laws. These reforms are based on extensive consultations with the public and stakeholders, focusing on enhancing public safety, service delivery and consumer choice. If passed, this legislation will give the Alcohol and Gaming Commission, AGCO, greater investigative and enforcement powers to ensure owners and operators of licensed establishments remain responsible. These powers will allow the AGCO to not only investigate applicants but also investigate others potentially associated with their business. This will prevent disreputable applicants from using a front, like a friend or a family member, to apply for a licence.

Additional changes that we're proposing as part of the broader reforms to liquor licensing will allow bars and restaurants to expand their licences to allow patrons to carry their drinks with them to separate areas of an establishment such as washrooms. This allows consumers to monitor their drinks at all times, reducing the likelihood of unknown substances such as date rape drugs being used to taint their drinks.

Even more consumer protection measures included in the proposed legislation will grant new powers to the electrical safety authority, the ESA, to proactively protect Ontario families from unsafe electrical products. With the changes being proposed, dangerous or unsafe electrical products can be seized or ordered removed from store shelves or where they are found by ESA. If a product has already been sold and is being used in people's homes, the ESA would have the power to call for the manufacturer to notify consumers that the product is unsafe. The safety powers in this bill cannot be beaten by any other jurisdiction in Canada.

In addition to these updates, Bill 152 would also allow us to target the advertising of illegal Internet gaming websites in Ontario. Illegal and unregulated gaming websites may prey on vulnerable consumers, including minors, and often encourage problem gambling. The proposed legislation would also ensure that the government is taking responsible measures to protect businesses operating legitimately in Ontario from illegal online gaming. Industries such as the horse industry, which is the second-largest industry in rural Ontario, are being affected by this kind of illegal activity.

On the topic of vulnerable consumers, we're also protecting Ontarians victimized by or concerned about identity theft. The people of this province work hard to achieve financial stability and deserve to know that their finances are secure. That's why this legislation will protect consumers and will let consumers take an active role in preventing identity thieves from accessing and making use of innocent people's personal information. If passed, this legislation would give consumers the right to place fraud alerts on their credit cards. Credit lenders and others who rely on credit reports would be required to take extra precautions in verifying the identity of consumers with a fraud alert on their credit record. Penalties could be imposed on organizations that do not meet these requirements.

This legislation isn't just about protecting consumers. It's also about modernizing our business laws to enable corporations to be more efficient and competitive. Our government believes that Ontario competes effectively on the global stage. Ontario businesses rely on clear and effective rules to maintain an efficient and ethical marketplace. By updating corporate laws, this act would help keep Ontario's economy strong, opening the door to new investment and making this province an even more attractive destination to do business and create jobs.

As Minister Phillips outlined, Bill 152 would also mean changes to the framework of the Archives of Ontario, the bereavement sector and this province's privacy standards.

Finally, this legislation also improves on how our government delivers service to families and businesses throughout Ontario. Service Ontario would have legal authority to become the government's service delivery provider, making it easier for people to access government services they need without having to worry about what ministry to go to.

The new measures are being introduced through Bill 152 to protect Ontarians and ensure that our government can deliver that protection the best way possible. The people of this province deserve the best, and that's what this legislation offers. If passed, this bill would allow our government to continue to offer consumers some of the best protection of any jurisdiction in the world. I urge all members to support this great piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I listened very carefully to the speeches by the minister and the parliamentary assistant. What was amazing about this speech is

that right near the end he said, "The people of this province deserve the best." I wonder what they're actually thinking today, after listening to that auditor's report last week. I wonder what they're really actually thinking about children's aid societies, the ones that basically committed fraud, and the Tom Parkinson deal. Isn't it amazing that at this stage in Parliament, where we're doing a consumer bill, millions and millions of consumers' and taxpayers' dollars have been wasted in this province?

I look forward to the comments from my colleague Mr. Tascona, who's an expert in this area and will be able to provide a lot of information that probably the minister and the parliamentary assistant haven't been able to provide as of yet. I'll be taking his advice on how I will vote on this bill in the end.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Two points on the bill: There are some parts of this bill that are fine, like most legislation—not most, but some. There are things you can agree with and things on which you can disagree.

On the mortgage fraud issue, I just want to say that it is becoming an increasingly larger problem in our society where, unbeknownst to a person who may have paid off their mortgage, somebody falsifies documents to remortgage their property without the person knowing.

I think the simpler way to do it would be that the insurance should be sold by insurance brokers on their house insurance, because part of the problem with giving banks or lending institutions the authority to sell insurance, on mortgage fraud, is that once your mortgage is paid, you're no longer paying the insurance premium. You're paying an insurance premium at the time that you are mortgaged to the hilt, at which point it doesn't matter, because nobody's going to defraud your mortgage because you already owe money on it. It's encumbered and they can't get any money from it in fraud. It becomes an issue once the house is actually paid for and, at that point, people stop paying mortgage insurance.

One of the things we should be looking at is to do some sort of legislation or regulatory change where it's necessary so that, when you are renewing your house insurance, basically your mortgage fraud insurance be included in your house insurance. Then, if your house is paid for, at least you would be insured against the mortgage fraud itself.

On the issue of the Electrical Safety Authority, I just want to say that I've had a number of issues with this particular organization with regard to some things they've done in the past. Maybe one day I'll get an opportunity to speak a little more in detail. But I'm not convinced that, at the end of the day, that was the way we should have gone. When we had a system where Ontario Hydro did inspections, it seemed to me it was a much more efficient system than what we have today.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I would like to stand up and speak in support of Bill 152. I had the chance to serve on that committee. We listened to many different people who came from different sectors

and spoke in support of this bill. I think it's very important and it's about time.

We have a minister and a government trying to reform business in Ontario. I know it was a very complex bill. It took a lot of time and effort because it dealt with so many different departments, so many different issues, from mortgage to real estate to the bereavement sector to gift cards—so many different elements. It was a big, huge and thick bill, but in the end I want to commend the minister for bringing such an important issue to the House and dealing with a very significant element. It is about time to reform those sectors in order to serve the people of Ontario.

We listened to a lot of real estate people who came and a lot of homeowners who spoke in support of the bill and on how we create the mechanism to protect them, protect their property. I think it's a very important bill..

1640

In the meantime, I want to commend the parliamentary assistant to the minister for his great job in leading us in the committee and explaining the important elements of the bill, and also the ministry staff, because, as I mentioned, we dealt with so many different elements. It is a technical bill.

In the end, we have to open all these files. We have to be clear, we have to be honest with the people of Ontario. Also, we have to make sure that they are protected. That's why I'm supporting this bill. I hope all members of the House will support it.

I know Mr. Tascona was there. We benefited from his talk and his questions, because he's a lawyer and he knows more than me about these elements. He also brought at one time his own bill to reform this issue.

Mr. Sterling: On the first point, I'd like the minister in response to confirm what the settlement of the property tax issue is with regard to cemeteries and funeral homes. As I understand the issue, as it now stands in this piece of legislation after committee, after amendment, both private funeral homes, either away from a cemetery site or on a cemetery site, will be taxed; that is, the funeral home portion of it will be taxed as a municipal tax. It's my understanding as well that due to the amendments, not-for-profits will also be taxed as a property tax. It's my understanding that Roman Catholic cemeteries will not be taxed that way but will make a payment in lieu, which will be used for keeping the cemetery viable and in condition. So everyone but the religious groups will be taxed the same way. That's the way I understand it.

Number two is with regard to title insurance. My feeling is that we should not even need title insurance of any nature in this province. It's an additional cost to landowners, and we should be able, as legislators, to fix up the present structure that we have in this province to ensure that fraud cannot occur and title cannot be taken away through fraudulent means. We have land title insurance under our land registry system. That should be an insurance of first resort and should be able to respond in a speedy fashion to any kind of fraud that should or could

take place. I don't think that Ontario homeowners should face the additional cost of title insurance over and above the land title costs they pay when they register their property.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Hon. Mr. Phillips: I appreciate the comments from the members from Simcoe North, Timmins-James Bay, London-Fanshawe and Lanark-Carleton.

Just to deal with the last issue first: Yes, if a non-profit organization builds a funeral home on the cemetery, they will be taxed on that portion of it for property tax. That's the one change we've made in the bill. Religious organizations will be required to make a payment in lieu, and that must be used—and will be monitored—in the care and maintenance of the cemetery. They can't use it on other things; it has to be used in the care and maintenance of cemeteries.

The member from London-Fanshawe talked about the comprehensive nature of the bill. I said earlier in my remarks that I think we, the Legislature, have to find ways to keep our laws up to date. It's a relatively comprehensive bill, and each of the elements is designed to keep our laws up to date with the changes in society. I'm not sure there's any better way of doing it.

The member from Timmins-James Bay mentioned the electrical safety association—in my opinion, doing some very good work, right now proceeding to ensure that all of our electricians in the province are licensed, including the companies doing the electrical work as well. I think this particular legislation does give them the authority to do the best they can to protect consumers. So I'm happy with the proposed changes to the electrical safety association, and I think they will help. And it's timely, I might say, with Christmas here. I think it will help in ensuring safe products are in the hands of consumers.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to join in the debate and do my lead on Bill 152. I can say honestly that I'm very disappointed in the public hearings. There were a lot of good presentations. The NDP and the PC Party put forth some very significant and meaningful amendments and every one of those amendments was turned down.

I want to give a good case in point. We heard from a group that was dealing with requiring bar owners to have mandatory liability insurance, which I thought was a very reasonable request for the government to consider. I want to quote from an e-mail that I received. It was actually to Mr. Dhillon, who's the PA, and it also went to myself. It's from Julia De Faria, who's the executive assistant of the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association. She's from Hamilton. I'll read it:

"Gentleman, I hope that we can forward this item through the proper channels for Monday's deadline but since the three of you asked questions regarding the mandatory insurance for licensees under the Liquor Licence Act, I wanted you to have this right away.

"The Ontario Trial Lawyers Association is a plaintiffs' lawyers association. I am not sure how many members it

does have, although I'm sure that it is at least a couple of hundred.

"Quite honestly, I had thought that those who do have insurance would have at least \$5 million or more and you can see that a couple of responses are consistent with that view. However, those who have experience with commercial host liability are stating that there is both an issue of no insurance and inadequate insurance.

"Most people who are significantly injured would garner damages in the millions. If there is no insurance available to them, then it is the province that pays the price. I hope that you will consider this matter as a priority."

That's a situation where someone goes to a bar, drinks too much and hits somebody—kills them or seriously injures them. The person who's injured goes to the people who are responsible; they go to the driver. If it was a driver without any insurance, then they would have to go to that bar where they served the person the liquor. If the bar doesn't have any insurance and they're faced with a lawsuit and they go into bankruptcy, that person who was injured, because of the responsibility of that driver who was drinking and that bar that served the person who ended up drinking and driving irresponsibly, doesn't have anywhere to go.

I proposed a very simple amendment, and the member from Niagara Centre was there and aware of this. What we proposed was mandatory condition liability insurance: "It is a condition of a licence that the applicant or licence holder obtain and maintain liability insurance in the prescribed amount with respect to the premises for which the licence is sought or the licensed premises, as the case may be." We gave the government maximum flexibility. We didn't say the amount; we said "the prescribed amount" because I know the minister likes to deal with regulations, bring the law up to date and give himself some flexibility. This was turned down.

It's outrageous that bar owners who serve people in this province—everybody knows the problem we have with drinking and driving—wouldn't be required to have, as a mandatory requirement to open and operate that bar, minimum liability insurance. Not only was there no debate on this by the Liberal members—because there wasn't any debate on any of the amendments; they were just there to vote down the amendments. There was no discussion; they just categorically denied it. That was brought up because there were presentations made on this particular issue. They were looking for some action from this government.

We moved, as the PC Party, amendments to make sure that this happened so that the roads would be safer from people who drink and drive, and if there is an accident, then those bar owners have to have some minimum liability insurance to protect that person who is fatally injured or severely injured. This government turned that down. I'm very disappointed about that, because that shows you that even though we were dealing with an omnibus bill, this government doesn't care.

The other part we were dealing with—the parliamentary assistant mentioned date rape drugs. It is not

even in the bill. All it is is hyperbole. It came in out of the Attorney General and out of a liquor licence review that was done by the government, saying, "Oh, we are going to deal with date rape drugs. We are going to make sure that people are safe and the people who could be affected by that can take their drinks to another area." It's optional if the minister does it, optional if the minister doesn't.

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We put forth an amendment with respect to this particular issue, and I know the minister responded to me in question period about how we don't have to put this on Swiss Chalets or other family restaurants. We weren't asking for that. We were asking, dealing with bars where this type of conduct goes on, to allow maximum flexibility within the liquor licence establishment to protect people from this date rape drug issue, which the government says is a serious issue, and I took them at their word. But quite frankly, when we put forth an amendment, they didn't even discuss it; they just voted it down.

The amendment that we put forth was the requirement to apply for an expanded licence, because what we are talking about is being able to take your drink from your table to another part of the bar, including washrooms and hallways. The amendment we put forth was the requirement to apply for an expanded licence: "A person who holds a licence to sell liquor for premises that constitute a bar or other prescribed premises shall promptly apply for a change to the licence holder's licence to cover the hallways and the washrooms to which patrons of the bar or other prescribed premises have access."

No discussion; voted down by the Liberal majority on the committee. That's just another area where they decided that they didn't want to hear the opposition.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Mindless.

Mr. Tascona: Yeah. The member for Niagara Centre says, "Mindless." That's being kind.

The other area that we put forth amendments on where there was no discussion whatsoever was in the electrical products safety area. I commend the minister: I was there for his press conference and the dog-and-pony show with all of these different products. You know, it was very informative—very, very informative—and dangerous, quite frankly, with respect to the products that were coming out of that particular press conference.

Mr. Sterling: Shocking.

Mr. Tascona: And shocking, as the minister from Ottawa mentions. And I agree, because where they were getting these products—people buy them for a cheap price. There were comments by the minister in the press conference about the dollar store, in terms of the products they sold that could result in fires or could result in someone being shocked. They were dangerous products, so I don't disagree with the minister on that. But what I said when we got into this was that there were 26 safety logos in the province. All I put forth, and I think it made ultimate sense, is, why don't we have one safety logo for the entire province so that people know, when they are buying a product, that it's safe?

We put forth that amendment: no discussion; just voted down. I would have thought the minister, taking this issue seriously, would have said, "Wait a second here. It's a little ridiculous to have 26 safety logos in this province when we know we have a serious problem with respect to safety products. We should go with one logo." No. They're not interested in that.

The other part of it was in terms of dealing with offshore manufacturers and product that comes in. What the minister is proposing is saying, "Well, after the accident occurs, after somebody is injured, we'll make sure the inspectors go in and make sure it doesn't happen again." That's really great news for the person who has been injured. It's hardly consumer protection.

What we proposed was that if you have these offshore manufacturers, which the minister knows they have no jurisdiction over—they have some jurisdiction over inshore manufacturers, as long as they are in the province of Ontario. If they put forth an unsafe product, they can go to the manufacturer and say, "Listen, you'd better fix up your product. You want to make sure it's safe before it goes in the stores." But with the offshore manufacturer, my point was that they shouldn't get into the stores. There should be vigilance at the distributor level to make sure it doesn't get out of the distributor's warehouse, because everybody knows there are some very large distributors in this province that would distribute to Costco, to Canadian Tire, to Rona and to Home Depot. It would be very simple to make sure the distributors make sure they don't have product going out that is unsafe, and make sure it's properly marked, because we're here to protect the consumer.

So we put forth an amendment saying that we need to have vigilance at the distributor level, because we know you have no jurisdiction over offshore manufacturers. Let's get it right so we can protect consumers so they don't have to face the consequences of an unsafe product. No debate from the Liberal majority on the committee; they voted it down. I'm very disappointed because, quite frankly, when you come out with a dog-and-pony show on electrical products, let's do something meaningful. Nothing meaningful has been done with respect to the electrical products industry, because we still have unsafe products out there. Quite frankly, the minister knows better in terms of protecting the consumers.

I want to tell the consumers that are out there, first of all, if you're looking for a safe product in this province, you've got the choice of 26 labels. If you want to make sure the product is safe, don't look to this government, because they're not going to make sure that the product that gets into the store is going to prevent you from buying it until you find out whether the product is safe or not. They'll look after you after the fact, when you get injured. That's not acceptable, and the minister knows that it isn't acceptable at all.

The next area that I want to move into, because I'm limited by my time here today with respect to this debate, is mortgage fraud. The minister, in this particular area—we've had a lot of discussion about this. There have been

some very high-profile headlines in the Toronto Star written by Harold Levy, and also by Bob Aaron and other people who are involved in that. What we're dealing with here is the classic syndrome of identity theft. We have a government-run land titles, land registration system—government-run. People sell and buy real estate and mortgage real estate based on a belief that the government-run land titles and land registry system is fail-proof. We know that's not true, because there is rampant mortgage fraud in this province; there is rampant title fraud in this province. Why? Because of identity theft, people taking someone else's identity and using that identity through a power of attorney. All you need to have in this province, because the minister didn't do anything on this issue, is a copy of a power of attorney—no independent assurance that it's legitimate, no original copy to show that it's actually legitimate—and you can use that power of attorney and misrepresent that you have the power of attorney over that property, whether you want to sell property or whether you want to mortgage that property. Just ask Susan Lawrence, just ask Paul Reviczky, just ask Elizabeth Shepherd, who were all subject to fraudulent powers of attorney which resulted in them losing the title to their home, resulted in them having mortgages put on their property in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

On Bill 152, we put forth an amendment to copy the legislation that's in place in Alberta with respect to powers of attorney, to make sure that powers of attorney are legitimate and that they can be relied on.

We also put forth legislation and amendments to make sure—when you're dealing with a lot of real estate transactions today, it can be done through e-mail or they're transmitted documents, electronic documents. We wanted a process that would ensure that what's being sent through the electronic process is certified, so you would know, when you get that document, that it is a certified electronic transaction and you can rely on it. What did the government do? They said, "No, we're not interested in that. That makes way too much sense. We're not interested in making sure that identity theft is removed from the land titles/land registry system."

So what we have now is the status quo. You can still get on to the Teranet system and become a person who can register a document through a false identity, whether you use an automobile licence or some other document. We heard the other day from the auditor's report that there are 300,000 OHIP cards given out to fictitious people, so that can be used for identity theft.

1700

The problem is that there is no requirement to protect the consumer. They do not know, like in Saskatchewan, that you can be notified by the director of titles saying, "Somebody is looking at your property with respect to selling it, with respect to putting a mortgage on it." In Saskatchewan, there's a notification procedure which is done by e-mail or by fax or whatever you choose to notify you that someone is tampering with your title. We asked the minister to look at that. He did look at it, but he

didn't make it a mandatory requirement for that to happen. He said, "Well, if the director of titles wants to do it, the director of titles can think about doing it." That's not good enough in terms of protecting someone from having all their equity in their property stolen, whether they're away from the property or even if they're living on the property—or whether they're renting the property. So what we have is a situation where nobody is going to get any notice. How would you know if someone was looking at your title? In this province, you wouldn't know at all.

What we also wanted to have put in was a PIN system, a personal identification number, so that no one could transact anything on your property unless you had the PIN. The PIN would make sure that the lawyer who was acting on the transaction, or the bank or the trust company or whatever lending institution was involved, wouldn't be able to do the transaction unless they knew your PIN and had your consent. That makes ultimate good sense. Of course, the government rejected that; they didn't want to do it. So that means identity theft, which is rampant in the system, is still going to be there, and that's very disappointing.

Now, in terms of dealing with the land titles assurance fund, everybody in the province should know—and the member from Lanark–Carleton, Norm Sterling, made a very good comment that nobody should have to have title insurance in this province. That's right, because if you have title insurance, all that title insurance gets you is the value of the price of your property. But your property is taken from you; you don't have it anymore. So what we wanted in place, and what we put in place under my Bill 136, was to make sure that no one would have to go to court to make sure that one's land title was secured. If you were a lender or if you had a fraudulent mortgage on your property, you wouldn't have to go to court to get that fraudulent mortgage put off the property. The innocent purchaser or the innocent lender would go to the land titles assurance fund to make sure that they would get the money that they were due in the transaction, if they were an innocent purchaser or an innocent lender.

The government didn't want to go that far. And to some credit, the case law that was out there said, "If you have a fraudulent mortgage registered on your title, that is a valid mortgage." It doesn't make any sense, because if you have a fraudulent transaction where you lose a title to your property, that can be overturned in court. But the courts made the decision about three years ago that if you register a fraudulent mortgage, that mortgage is valid. The government's Bill 152 will change that; that will not be the case with respect to a fraudulent mortgage in this province anymore. So the fight we put on that started earlier this year the government actually listened to, to make sure that people such as Susan Lawrence, Elizabeth Shepherd and Paul Reviczky in the future—because this is what this bill is: It's prospective with respect to providing some property rights to the public. It's not, as the minister is trying to suggest, retroactive: "Oh, yes, it's going to help Susan Lawrence, it's going to help

Elizabeth Shepherd and it's going to help Paul Reviczky." That just isn't what the legislation says. It doesn't say that at all.

I want to deal with that part right now, because this is what the minister was talking about with respect to the land titles assurance fund. The land titles assurance fund is a fund you go to if you have had your property taken away from you or if you've had a fraudulent mortgage put on your property, but the government set it up as a fund of last resort. You had to go through court, you had to try to find a fictitious character, and that just wasn't the way it should be. In New Brunswick, under their legislation—you go to the land titles assurance fund, which is a government general revenue fund—they allow you to go to that as a fund of first resort to protect your property.

The minister, after much consternation—because he didn't really want to have the land titles assurance fund as a fund of first resort; he had difficulties with that because that's what was in Bill 136. He's amended section 57 of the Land Titles Act, which deals with the land titles assurance fund, which I've agreed will help property owners because no longer will a fraudulent mortgage that's registered be valid in this province. But what they've done has raised other questions. For example, how does an existing property owner demonstrate the requisite due diligence to entitle them to compensation from the fund? The onus is on the property owner to show the requisite due diligence in terms of trying to protect their property from a fraudulent land transfer or a fraudulent mortgage. There's no way of knowing if someone is scoping your title through the Teranet system or if someone has walked up to the land registry office in your community, has pulled the abstract on your title and said, "Well, I think I want to take a look at this." How would you know? You wouldn't know.

The other part, where the minister says, "We're protecting Susan Lawrence, Elizabeth Shepherd and Paul Reviczky. We'll allow the people who were defrauded in the past to come in and go to the land titles assurance fund"—my question is, who will constitute "the prescribed class of people" qualifying for earlier payment? It doesn't mention.

At the hearings—and the member for Durham was there, when he could make it, and that was fairly regularly; I did use his advice on many occasions. The problem is, we asked them. We put forth amendments. We even went to legislative counsel and said, "This bill only applies to transactions after October 19, 2006." We put forth an amendment to have that changed to any transaction from 1996 onward so we could catch all the fraud that was in the system for the people who relied on the government-run land titles assurance system and land titles registry system, to allow them to go to their own fund—they relied on the government to protect their home from fraudulent title transactions or fraudulent mortgages—and say, "Listen, I got taken on my property through no fault of my own. I should be able to go to the land titles assurance fund to protect myself." No, the government wouldn't go for that. They didn't want to debate

it because, quite frankly, that wasn't something they really had their heads around. But the bill speaks for itself. It's any transaction after October 19, 2006.

We got assurances from the ministry staff and they were saying, "No, it's going to protect Susan Lawrence, Mr. Reviczky and Elizabeth Shepherd. The minister is going to put the all-mighty directive in there that will allow them to go to the fund." My question was, "If that is the case, why don't you make sure that everything is retroactive to the point in time where these people lost their title and also lost a significant amount of equity on their property?" They wouldn't do that. They said, "Don't worry. The minister is going to put in a directive."

My point is, the minister can't override the legislation. The director of titles, who deals with the land titles assurance fund, has to apply the law. He can't create law in terms of protecting these people. So we're putting it to the minister: When he says this prescribed class of people qualifying for earlier payment, he'd better be living up to his word—unlike what he did with respect to the funeral industry—and making sure that those people, like Susan Lawrence, Elizabeth Shepherd, Paul Reviczky and all the people who lost a significant amount of equity in their property through a mortgage fraud, get proper compensation. Because the way the system works up until this bill is passed is that every fraudulent mortgage that is registered on title prior to October 19, 2006, is valid. That means if you had a \$300,000 fraudulent mortgage slapped on your property, you're stuck with that mortgage. The bill's prospective effect will protect people in the future from that particular transaction.

1710

Still missing is a time frame for compensation decisions. In his letter of November 22, 2006, Minister Phillips said, "For these standard cases of fraud, in which there is no court action and both the victim and their lawyer are co-operating, we will ensure that title is returned and a land title assurance fund decision, i.e. compensation, is made within 90 days." This is in his letter. The minister is famous for his letters that flew in these Bill 152 hearings, especially with respect to the funeral industry. Nothing to that effect appears in the amendments to Bill 152 in terms of timely decision-making. There is no time limit with respect to the decisions. The minister is saying, "Oh, it'll happen within 90 days if everybody is co-operating." It's not in the bill. The amendments to subsection 57(13) and additional subsection 57(13.1) only deal with notification.

One of the parts of the bill that is in this is under clause 57(16)(b), which is dealing with the land titles assurance fund. It denies lenders the right to make a claim against the land titles assurance fund unless they have "demonstrated the requisite due diligence as specified by the director" of land registration. This is a meaningless provision, as almost all lenders today have their mortgage titles insured rather than looking to the land titles assurance fund for compensation. Clause 59(1)(e) denies title insurers the right to file a claim

against the land titles assurance fund that is derived from a subrogated claim. This will inevitably drive up the cost of title insurance for consumers. It also indicates how the government would rather dump the cost of mortgage fraud on title insurers than assume responsibility for its prevention.

The minister also deals with fraudulent mortgages that were registered prior to October 19, 2006. In section 78, quoting from the explanatory note of the bill: "A fraudulent instrument will not have any effect on the title register. Instruments registered subsequent to a fraudulent instrument are deemed to be effective." This effectively reverses, albeit 11 months late, the Court of Appeal decision in *Household Realty Corp. Ltd. v. Liu*. That case established the concept of immediate indefeasibility in Ontario, i.e., a fraudulent deed or mortgage would still be valid and enforceable if the buyer or lender was innocent, i.e., unaware of the fraud. Bill 152 would restore the concept of deferred indefeasibility in Ontario. With deferred indefeasibility, a fraudulent deed or mortgage is null and void even if the buyer or lender was innocent. We'll talk about the buyer or lender A. However, the Land Titles Act also created the mind-boggling legal fiction about a second transaction. If B was an innocent buyer/lender, and B dealt with A as a supposed owner of a property, B acquired a valid deed or mortgage even though the earlier deed to A was fraudulent. Because of deferred indefeasibility, it is possible for a property owner to (a) lose the title to their property, or (b) be stuck with a valid and enforceable mortgage against the title to their property even though they did not sign it. Rather than making the situation clearer with respect to mortgage fraud, the minister has done nothing more than tinkering, from the date of his announcement just before the by-election that the Liberals lost in Parkdale-High Park back in August. He's done nothing. Essentially the amendments (1) clarify the suspension process for submitters of fraudulent documents in the Land Registration Reform Act, (2) tinker with the land titles assurance fund, and (3) modify definitions in the Land Titles Act. No other substantive changes are made to the Land Titles Act dealing with real estate fraud.

There are two cases where deferred indefeasibility was applied in recent years: *Durrani v. Augier*, an Ontario court decision, and the *Toronto Dominion Bank v. Jiang*, which was in 2003. Mortgages, in both cases from a fraudulent borrower to an innocent lender, were held to be valid and enforceable against the true property owner. With deferred indefeasibility, title theft becomes more difficult but not impossible, since instruments may only be validated in a second transaction. Equity theft remains a very legitimate threat, as in the cases noted above.

That's what it's all about. Where people have paid off the mortgage, the property is prime for a fraudulent mortgage because there's all kinds of equity in that particular property. That's what they're after. So the minister doesn't get rid of the identity theft problem that is rampant throughout this province. What he does is make it possible for someone to do a transaction after there's

been a fraudulent transaction and make it legitimate. I don't really think that is the way legislation should work in this province—in terms of not solving the problem. That's exactly what the minister has done. Also, in terms of dealing with the people who register the documents on the system, he has gone back—this is what he thinks is going to stop identity theft. He's going to make sure that nobody is going to want to register a document with respect to a mortgage or transaction in this province. Bill 152 would allow the director of land registration to immediately suspend the electronic registration privileges of a submitter where the director reasonably believes a fraudulent document has been submitted electronically or where the director considers it is in the public interest to do so. No distinction is made between a submitter who registers a fraudulent instrument after taking reasonable precautions and one who is privy to the crime. Who is the submitter remains undefined, and what public interest suspensions are justified remains unanswered too.

1720

Suspensions by the director are immediate and without notice. Can you believe that? The director of land titles has the power to suspend and take away the licence of a lawyer without a hearing. The suspensions by the director are immediate and without notice. Once suspended, the submitter has 15 days to request a hearing to avoid having their privileges revoked. Amazingly, any hearing would be held before the director of land registration, the same person who initiated the suspension. Hearings would be in written form, not orally, unless the director ordered otherwise. Besides making the director of land registration omnipotent, this scheme is a blatant denial of natural justice. One person is empowered to issue suspensions, conduct revocation hearings and decide the form of hearing. No time frame appears in Bill 152 stating when the hearing must be conducted, nor does a time frame appear in Bill 152 stating when a decision must be rendered. During this indeterminate period of time, the submitter remains suspended, potentially causing irreparable harm to an innocent lawyer, their practice and their clients—draconian, to say the least, as the submitter of a fraudulent instrument can be suspended until proven innocent.

What society are we living in here? What is the Liberal government trying to do here? All we said to them was, "Stop the identity theft on the system by making sure that my identity is not taken from me." What have they come up with? They've come up with a system that says, "Oh, if we think there's something going wrong here, we're going to look at who registered that document and we're going to whack the person who registered that document without a hearing and without any discussion." It doesn't make any sense to conduct business that way in this province.

On this mortgage fraud business, the minister has moved with baby steps. He hasn't solved the problem. It's not going away. People who are involved in fraudulent activity in this province are taking away from people like seniors who don't have any mortgages

registered against their property—they're plum for the picking—because they're still going to be able to get on that Teranet system and scope properties to see who owns it and whether there's any mortgage on it.

I want to recognize a lot of people. I have a stack of petitions. I've received thousands and thousands from people petitioning the province to make changes to the land titles system in this province to protect their property from mortgage fraud and title theft. I want to thank those people for sending in and doing the work about getting people to respond to this particular issue. There's been yeoman work done, with respect to the media in terms of reporting this, by Harold Levy of the Toronto Star and Bob Aaron, who writes about these issues. Unfortunately, there's too much writing material for Mr. Aaron because the problem isn't going away. It just continues to come up with some of the craziest situations where people defraud other people with respect to real estate.

I certainly want to thank Susan Lawrence, for whom this has been a painful ordeal throughout. Fortunately, she was represented by very good legal counsel in Morris Cooper. She has been very vocal, very strident in this particular issue, notwithstanding the fact that when she went to her Liberal MPP for help, she didn't get any help.

But this is before the House, and perhaps the minister will live up to his word and ensure that Susan Lawrence not only gets her title back to her house and gets the mortgage removed from her property, but all the compensation that she incurred, whether it's payments she shouldn't have had to make on her mortgage, legal fees she shouldn't have had to incur to protect her title and making sure there was no mortgage on her property—that she get that restored from the land titles assurance fund. The minister has not emphatically guaranteed that that will happen. He's playing word games. He's playing semantics.

The same thing goes to the help that was given by Elizabeth Shepherd and Paul Reviczky, two seniors who had copies of powers of attorney used by people who said they were their grandchildren, going to the lawyer and saying, "Oh, by the way, we've got power to transact, sell the property and put a mortgage on that property," and they did it. So we go to the government and say, "Listen, this is happening with a copy of a power of attorney: no independent verification. Will you make changes to that?" The minister says in his letter, "Yes, we're going to do that." Then I go read the legislation, and there's nothing in the legislation. So I don't know how he's going to do that in terms of making sure that powers of attorney are the documents that they're supposed to be. They're supposed to be used in situations that are meaningful in terms of protecting the person who is not able to deal with that particular property, whether it's from a medical problem or whether it's because they're absent, and they need to be able to do this through a family mechanism. It's got to be independently verified, and it's got to be an original. No one should be able to transact business on a copy of a power of

attorney, but the Liberal government says they can do that, and they think it's okay.

It's a disappointing day for property owners in this province because, quite frankly, for all the hyperbole, all the sounds of action from this government when it started, when they knew they were going to lose that by-election in Parkdale-High Park, nothing has changed since they made those announcements in August. As a consumer, as a legislator, I think it's very disappointing, because we gave them very valid amendments, things that would change the land titles assurance, land registration system to protect identity theft from getting on that.

It's very simple. As the senior member, Mr. Sterling, indicated, nobody should need land titles assurance; nobody should need it. They should be able to rely on the government-run system to make sure that their identity is not stolen from them so that someone could transact any kind of transaction on that system to take away their home or slap a significant mortgage on their property. It's not that difficult to deal with.

My bill that was put forth, Bill 136—I want to say thanks for the help I received on that bill, and even up to today, from Alan Silverstein. He's a bencher with the law society, a certified real estate professional and a person who really understands this issue and has written about it in the Toronto Sun.

Every one of the recommendations we have put forth to correct this system, from jurisdictions in New Zealand, from jurisdictions in Alberta, from New Brunswick, from British Columbia, every one of the proposals was rejected by this government because they do not believe there is a problem with the government-run land titles system. Even in the face of a decision by Justice Echlin at the Superior Court level, where he said categorically that mortgage fraud in this province is a plague, that the government owes it to consumers to make sure the system is not only sound in terms of making sure that transactions are done in an efficient manner but that people can rely on the system to make sure they don't lose their house or don't have a fraudulent mortgage put on their property—he said that should not only be done in the future, but it should have been done to protect people in the past through the land titles assurance fund.

So what does this government do in the face of a recent Superior Court decision? They do nothing, other than to say, "We'll protect you from a fraudulent mortgage on the initial deal, the initial transaction. If someone puts a fraudulent mortgage on your property, you'll be protected. We'll make sure that's removed. But if there's another deal done from a fraudulent mortgager to an innocent party, you're out of luck." That doesn't make any sense at all, that we can play games like that with respect to what is probably for most people their most important asset and what they're relying on for their retirement, let alone to have a roof over their head.

1730

But the government not only didn't want to discuss any amendments, they basically voted everything down

because they don't believe there's a problem. So yes, I'm disappointed with respect to the response of this government to the thousands of people who wrote in wanting change to protect their homes.

I remember a woman named Muriel Chudiak who came in from Mississauga. She went around with her husband from home to home because she was so concerned about this issue, and obtained over 300 signatures from her neighbours, telling them, "This is an issue we've got to make the government move on." She did that. I even spoke to her today because she has concerns. She asked me, "Joe, how's Bill 136 doing?" I said, "Bill 136"—which is my private member's bill—"is effectively dead because the government is going ahead with their Bill 152 and not doing anything with respect to amendments. I can assure you that you're not going to be protected the way you should be protected as a property owner in this province and a person who pays their bills, pays their taxes and is an upstanding citizen who relies on a government-run land title system," which, quite frankly, nobody can rely on in this province—not anymore, after what this government has done. All they've really done is made sure that every fraudster in this province knows that this government doesn't care and is not going to do anything about mortgage fraud.

Tomorrow is the last day of debate on this bill, which is third reading. Then the vote on this bill is going to be Wednesday. At that time this bill will become law, because I imagine the government will look for royal assent immediately thereafter in terms of bringing this bill to its conclusion—and a sorry conclusion, because we could have done better.

Mr. Kormos: It's a missed opportunity.

Mr. Tascona: It's not only a missed opportunity, as the member from Niagara Centre says; it's a situation where we knew what needed to be done and it was so easy to do, but this government didn't want to do it. They not only didn't want to do it, they didn't want to listen. It was just total arrogance.

The last section I want to deal with in this bill, which is an omnibus bill with over 200 pages dealing with all kinds of different areas—I'll only touch on a few—is the death business. The government decides to get into the death business. They think, "We've had six years of consultations. The minister is getting impatient. Thirty-three recommendations out of the"—

Mr. Kormos: I'd rather have his severance package.

Mr. Tascona: Yes, who wouldn't want Parkinson's severance package: \$3.1 million? I don't know whether that's in Canadian or US dollars but, quite frankly, that isn't too bad a deal, especially when you quit: "We'll not only let you quit, but we'll pay you to quit." That's not a bad deal. But I digress, because the member from Niagara Centre has chosen to make me digress there.

We're back to the death business. The government is taxing the death business; they're into the death business. We have six years of consultation. The industry comes to a consensus. It says, "We want to deal with the death business this way." The minister sends me an undated

letter—which I now think was rather clever—prior to when we start public hearings, saying, “Status quo. Let’s go ahead. We’re going to make sure that what we agreed with”—there were a lot of ministers on there. I know Norm Sterling was one of the ministers, Bob Runciman was, at one time, and Tim Hudak and Minister Phillips, and they all came to an agreement that, “We’re going to deal with this issue.” So we get a consensus. We get into the public hearings. Some valid points were made in the public hearings with respect to a level playing field. But the government, in its wisdom, says, “Well, we’re having public hearings, but do we really have to have public hearings? We’re going to have to make some changes.” The next time we got into the public hearings, which was a week ago last week, the minister came up with another letter. He’s saying, “We sort of looked at this issue. We think we’re going to make some more changes.” So what he decides is, “We’re not going to allow not-for-profit cemeteries in this province to be untaxed,” and there are 1,700 of them. So in his wisdom, he says, “We’re going to couple them in with for-profit corporations and we’re going to treat not-for-profits as taxable entities.”

That’s all fair for the minister to say, but he represented to the committee that he wasn’t going to do anything. Then we’re down to the last day of hearings and we get a letter saying, “We’re going to do something here.” The very next day, we’re into clause-by-clause, where he’s made his move.

Where I think he’s made a mistake on this—and I’m not one for saying there shouldn’t be a level playing field for everybody who is involved: funeral directors, religious cemeteries, municipal cemeteries, not-for-profit cemeteries. Everybody agrees that it should be a level playing field. But where I think the minister misses the point—and I don’t think he thought it through. He didn’t admit it today, but I did question him on it. After I put my question to him—he didn’t answer the question—he just said, “Well, you know, we’re going to act on 32 of the 33 recommendations. If we try to get that other recommendation agreed on, we’re going to be waiting another five years. So I’d better move on it now.”

I asked him the question: “Why did you break your word? Why are you going to tax everybody in the death business the way you feel that they should be taxed?” Quite frankly, the non-profits are not in a very strong financial position and he knows very well that if he puts a municipal property tax on them, they could be out of business. And who’s going to hold the bill? The municipal taxpayer. That’s who is going to hold the bill.

So after my question, within 10 seconds, I got another letter from the minister. It’s addressed to Mr. Kormos and Mr. Runciman, but he was kind enough to c.c. the critic, who is me. He said, “It’s not the intent of the ministry to change the tax treatment of small-scale ancillary services provided by cemeteries. The ministry’s intent is to capture larger-scale commercial activities such as funeral establishments and visitation centres established upon cemeteries. Operating such activities will require a licence, which will trigger the need for a property tax assessment.”

What’s going to attract the property tax assessment is the amendments that he made in his own bill, where he categorically said that non-profits would be treated the same as for-profit cemeteries, which would mean MPAC is going to have to make their move.

Should MPAC decide that the predominant use is that of a funeral operation by that non-profit corporation—because what they generally look at is the revenues. If the revenues are going to be greater if there’s a funeral establishment on that property, then two things are going to happen and both of them aren’t good for consumers.

If they decide the predominant use is the funeral operation, then the non-profit corporation is going to be entirely taxed, from a property tax point of view, on all commercial activities in that cemetery. Why? Because that’s what the bill says. They’re going to be taxed on all commercial activities. So instead of saying, “We’re going to leave the cemetery part alone,” they’re going to have to treat the entire cemetery and all the activities on it for property tax assessment. There’s no other way that he can go, unless he’s going to decide he’s the property tax assessor.

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The other part where I think he’s made his mistake is that this is going to jack up the fees in the death business incredibly for the consumers. He knows it’s going to, because there’s no other way that it won’t.

All we’re saying is, listen, you can’t play games. You represent that there’s no change before we get into the public hearings; we get into the public hearings; after we finish two days, you make your move to change it—no consultation with the committee, no consultation with anybody. What we’re saying is, take out schedule D, don’t proclaim it, until you talk with the industry some more. What’s wrong with that? You already talked with them for six years. You come out with your legislation. It’s not accepted unanimously, though you represented to us that it was. It wasn’t. Talk to them some more. See if you can make an arrangement to get consensus.

Nobody on this side of the aisle is saying that we shouldn’t have a level and equal playing field with respect to the death business. The Liberals want to tax the death business, but they want to tax it in their own way. Rest assured—and member Norm Sterling mentioned this—religious cemeteries and municipal cemeteries are going to be taxed, in a way, because there are going to be in lieu taxes where they’ll put it into their properties to make them better. The minister says, “We’ll make sure that they do it.” Well, the way they oversee Hydro One, who in their right mind will believe that they are going to oversee anything? With respect to the number of OHIP cards in this province—300,000 more than are needed. Are you kidding me that they’re going to oversee this industry to make sure that it’s a level playing field? I don’t think so.

So what’s going to happen is you’re going to have a jack-up in the prices for consumers at the religious cemeteries and also at the municipal cemeteries. Because they’re being taxed in an in lieu manner, they’re still

going to have to take money out of their operation and put it into another fund. Then the government is going to monitor that fund and say, "Where did you put it?" It's going to be interesting, the tests that they come up with with respect to how that money can be put in. If it's anything like the children's aid society, which was also audited—they were putting in expenses for their SUVs and putting in for vacations and all kinds of things. I'm not going to lay that on with respect to my respect for the industry with respect to religious cemeteries and municipal corporations.

It's a comment on the lack of due diligence of this government and, quite frankly, a system that they set up after six years of consultation and represented to me as a committee member that there was consensus when there wasn't consensus. As a legislator, I don't appreciate being misled with respect to whether there's consensus when I have to vote.

The Deputy Speaker: I think the member should reconsider his language.

Mr. Tascona: I will, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: And what will he do with it?

Mr. Tascona: I'm not going to say that I was misled. I'm going to say that—

The Deputy Speaker: I want to hear the word "withdraw."

Mr. Tascona: Withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Tascona: I really didn't have the full understanding because I was told something that was different than what I believed.

Back to my point: We need to be fair in the death business, because the Liberals want to tax the death business and they're doing it. They're going to tax the death business and they're going to tax it the way they want. All we're saying on this side of the aisle—I think the member from Niagara Centre would agree—is that you're not going to find consensus on the last day of committee hearings and expect us to deal with it that way. We wanted to be fair to everybody.

The Liberal amendments went through on this particular bill. We're facing a situation where the minister is still sending me letters, and I'm not buying it at this stage of the proceedings because we're out of committee hearings. So we're going to have to be fair. I think there needs to be more consultation in the funeral business.

In closing, because I'm down to about 47 seconds and counting, I want to say this: Homeowners in this province have been let down by this government. People who have been hit in a drinking-and-driving fatality have been let down by this government because they're not requiring any liability insurance for bar owners. The people in this province who are injured by electronic products have been let down by this government because there's no standard safety logo for those products. No one is doing anything to keep those products out of the store.

My lead is over, and I look forward to the time for questions and comments.

The Deputy Speaker: And it is time for questions and comments.

Mr. Kormos: I appreciate the contribution that the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, Mr. Tascona, has made to this whole debate. In fact, his Bill 136 paved the way for the legislation.

One of the things that was frustrating and disappointing for me and, I'm sure, a whole lot of other people is that this has been an exercise in a lost opportunity. There was some incredible assistance available to us, lawyer journalists like Aaron and Silverstein, who were extremely helpful, and in a very non-partisan way.

My fear is that nothing in this legislation is going to restrict, reduce—never mind eliminate—the introduction of forged and otherwise fraudulent documents to the land titles system. Oh, there are some policies which will provide punishment, fairly or unfairly and accurately or inaccurately, for, let's say, lawyers or conveyancers who register those documents, but nothing in the bill is going to protect Ontarians from forged or otherwise fraudulent documents.

The gaping hole of the electronic registry system—don't forget, we learned that this isn't even a scan of the document that gets sent to a land titles office; it's simply the information. What a gaping hole. Talk about the Achilles heel of a system that's already fragile. Nothing in the legislation addresses that.

The solution was to develop a program whereby we've got real people, trained people, skilled people, public sector workers in those offices screening and reviewing each and every document that's put forward. That's how you detect forged or otherwise fraudulent documents. Nothing in this bill is going to achieve that end.

Mr. Dhillon: It's a pleasure again to speak in favour of Bill 152, the Ministry of Government Services Consumer Protection and Service Modernization Act. It's one of the first bills that I worked on, as a parliamentary assistant, in a committee setting. I must commend Mr. Phillips for his hard work and his consultation right until the end in making sure our stakeholders were happy, especially in the bereavement sector. I remember receiving a letter at one of the last hearings about how happy they were with Mr. Phillips listening and addressing their concern and creating a more level playing field in that business.

With respect to mortgage fraud, there's a lot in this bill that addresses that. It makes the land titles assurance fund easier to navigate and more responsive, so that people who are victims of fraudsters of this nature do get some recourse as to the problems that they're faced with.

The other thing is that in this bill the fines for mortgage fraud go to \$50,000 from \$1,000. That's a big move, a big deterrent. There are other safeguards to suspend and revoke the accounts of fraudsters, another big deterrent.

For gift cards: Innocent people purchase gift cards so they can cash in these gift cards for the value that's on them, \$50, often \$100; small amounts. It's not nice when people cannot use these cards that are given as a gift.

So there are a lot of good things in the bill, and we opposed the amendments because they didn't make any sense.

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): I appreciate the opportunity to speak briefly to Bill 152. I don't know that there's that much I can add to the excellent commentary and analysis provided by my colleague this evening, the member from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford, not to mention the excellent work that he did with respect to Bill 136, which of course preceded Bill 152 and, in my view, did an excellent job in terms of dealing with the whole issue of mortgage fraud.

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That is the issue I would like to speak to in the brief time allotted to me, and that is the specific section, section 23, which deals with the ability of the director of land registration to suspend immediately and without notice the registration privileges of anyone who has access to the electronic registration system. This has been a matter of serious concern to the legal profession, and I should say to real estate law practitioners in particular. Having come from that background myself before coming to this Legislature, I would like to say that I echo those concerns because there are many practitioners who only practise in the area of real estate. In a situation where they have innocently registered a document that turns out to be fraudulent, their registration privileges can be immediately suspended, and that will put them into a situation where they can't work. They can't close deals, can't register deeds or mortgages on behalf of clients, so that effectively puts them and their entire staff out of business. So I would submit that this is really a draconian provision. It goes too far as a hammer against many of the real estate lawyers practising with diligence, I should say, in this area of law. It's also a situation that really denies natural justice, because if the director of land registration suspends the person's ability to register, then they are also the one who will hold the hearing in the future. That's a clear conflict of interest and shouldn't happen.

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I listened with great interest to my colleague from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford's speech today on this bill, although I must say he seemed to have spent more time talking about the Auditor General's report than the legislation.

I don't know what disappointed me the most: the fact that he didn't deal with the legislation or the fact that he didn't bring up the fact that it was our government which allowed the Auditor General to go out to these agencies and make sure taxpayers' money is being spent properly, something that his government didn't do.

But more importantly, when it comes to the legislation, again, we heard a lot about the committee process. What he didn't bring up is the fact that the government put forward 32 amendments that were adopted to enhance Bill 152, which included streamlining the land titles assurance fund, limiting access to the electronic land registration system, and modifying the property tax section to ensure an equitable, fair and level playing field in the bereavement industry—all approaches which strengthened the bill and took into account the deputations that we heard.

The core of this piece of legislation is really about the times we live in, a time of increasing use of electronics, of new technologies. What we're finding is that the consumer needs protections that we didn't even think about 50 years ago, some might say; in many cases we're talking about a society which over the last four or five years has changed dramatically. We need to provide Ontarians with the types of protection that this bill affords. That's why what's coming forward is a package of protections, a package of measures which are going to be protecting consumers and taking into account the changes within our society and the changes in technology.

Bill 152 represents a strengthened bill that's come back from committee. I think members on all sides of the House would do well to protect Ontarians by supporting this important piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Tascona: I'm very pleased to hear the comments by the member from Niagara Centre, the parliamentary assistant to the minister, the member from Whitby–Ajax and the member from Kitchener Centre.

Certainly the comments that were made by the members from Niagara Centre and Whitby–Ajax with respect to their concern for consumers not being protected from forged documents: That's the fact. They're not protected. Nothing has happened in this bill, through the bill itself or the amendments that came forth, that was any more than just technical amendments that do nothing to stop identity theft in this province.

For the parliamentary assistant to say that the amendments made no sense—say that to the person who's gravely injured in a car accident by someone who was drinking too much at a bar that doesn't have any liability insurance. Say to that family that the amendment put forth by the member from the PC Party, Mr. Tascona, made no sense. Why should a bar have mandatory liability insurance? Why should they be responsible for your injury when they got someone drunk who went out on the highway and injured your daughter or your son? Why should they be responsible?

Interjection.

Mr. Tascona: That's right.

That doesn't make sense, according to the parliamentary assistant for the government. It doesn't make sense to make sure that nobody can steal your house, that no one can slap a fraudulent mortgage on your property—because I said that this bill does not do anything to stop identity theft in the real estate business; nothing. They not only didn't debate the amendments, they didn't even look at them; they just basically voted them down. That's the type of democracy we've got in this House today.

The Deputy Speaker: It would surprise no one that my pocket watch says it's time to adjourn the House.

The House will resume at 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1756.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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		York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Vacant

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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des débats
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Monday 11 December 2006

Lundi 11 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. BrownClerk
Claude L. DesRosiersPrésident
L'honorable Michael A. BrownGreffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 11 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 11 décembre 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (LEARNING TO AGE 18), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (APPRENTISSAGE JUSQU'À L'ÂGE DE 18 ANS)

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 6, 2006, on the motion for third reading of Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning / *Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant l'apprentissage des élèves jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans et l'apprentissage équivalent.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 52 for a couple of reasons. One is because it turns out that there has been quite a bit of interest in this particular bill from the people of my community, but I'm going to get to that a little later on.

Since I'm the first speaker on the bill tonight, I thought maybe it would be important to outline what the bill is about. People may recall that when this bill came forward from the government, "learning to age 18" was what we were talking about at the time or what the government was talking about at the time. There were also some other pieces to the bill when it originally came to us that included things like preventing people from getting a driver's licence, for example, if they weren't going to stay in school till age 18. So there were some measures that were initially in the bill that aren't there now at this point, which is third reading debate, but they were there at the beginning.

Some would say that they were put there on purpose to try to distract people's attention from the whole idea of punishing kids by forcing them to stay in school and threatening, that they keep that threat there that if they don't stay in school, they're not going to be able to get their driver's licence. That way, by raising that spectre and getting people's ire up on that issue, the government

was trying to detract or trying to create an illusion that there was nothing else of severe consequence in the bill.

Of course, looking through the bill, there are many, many problems with it, but in effect what the bill does and the most problematic part of the bill as it even stands today at third reading debate is this idea of equivalent learning credits, so that young people who have had a challenging time in high school, who are not engaging very productively or well in the course curriculum being provided by high schools, can more or less get those credits from outside organizations or agencies to make up for the fact that they're not able to necessarily get that credit at school. So it's an equivalent learning kind of program.

Part of the problem that not only myself and my wonderful critic, a former teacher in this area, Mr. Marchese from the riding of Trinity-Spadina—not only do we have significant concerns about this concept, but so do many, many others. Anybody who's interested in this issue needs only to log on to Hansard and look at Bill 52, particularly the Hansards of the committee hearings where many people came to speak to this bill, and you can hear for yourself exactly the problems they were identifying. I'm going to be referring to some more of those in detail in a few moments.

What the equivalent learning proposal is or what the government's claiming it's going to do is to increase the educational opportunities that are available for students who are in danger of leaving school. But the problem is, the bill itself is pretty much silent on the details of what that equivalent learning is going to look like. There's no real fleshing out of that concept and no identification of exactly who is going to set the standards, how they're going to be set and who's going to be able to make sure that the standards that are put in place are actually monitored over time to ensure that the equivalent learning is a learning and enriching experience for our young people. None of that is defined in the bill. In fact, it's left up to very non-rigorous, from my perspective, and very ephemeral procedures that nobody is really going to keep account of.

1850

The problem is that there is no significant definition or accountability in this legislation that can make us feel, as parents, particularly—I'm a parent, and my son is in grade 9 this year, so he's just starting his post-secondary experience. As a parent, I don't find that this bill makes me feel that the education system Ontario once prided itself on is going to be upheld and reflected in this

alternative learning scheme that the Liberal government has brought forward.

Needless to say, as I read through our own briefing notes and spoke to my colleague Rosario Marchese, our critic, about this, I got pretty concerned. We were worried about not only the definitions, the procedures of accrediting organizations that will be able to provide these learning credits, but we were also concerned about the location where these credits are going to be achieved or gained by students. Who is checking to make sure that the various facilities, organizations and locations where these credits are going to be offered are actually going to be up to snuff and are going to be appropriate places for young people to obtain credits? I can't believe how fast time is going already. I can't even finish what I was going to say on that.

Interestingly enough, as I read on and on in the Hansard what people were saying about this bill, two things happened to me. One is that I personally grew more and more concerned about this government's scheme for these alternative learning credits. In fact, I got pretty outraged that the bill seemed to be moving at such a quick pace and that there really wasn't a heck of a lot of time for people to make their voices known on this. So the one thing that happened was that I personally got very, very concerned as I continued reading through Hansard.

The other thing that happened to me was that I grew prouder and prouder of the students, teachers, parents and school board trustees in my city, the city of Hamilton, for standing up for public education. I can tell you that they came out in droves to the hearings in Toronto. Hamilton was extremely well represented in terms of the comments to this government on this bill. Most of these presentations said to the government that their scheme of delivering credits through equivalent learning programs was not only wrong-headed but was just totally wrong, period, for a number of different reasons. It was wrong for students, it was wrong for teachers and it was wrong for the education system of Ontario. But it is just too bad that the Liberal government has not been listening to the concerns that have been raised by these individuals. I am getting a little bit ahead of myself.

One of the things that I think is important to acknowledge is that it is not just one group or organization. Oftentimes government will say, "Well, you know, it's this one interest group that has raised a concern." In this case, we had students coming to committee, we had teachers, we had trustees, and I'm going to read from a letter sent by my trustees from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, our newly elected board of trustees. They sent a pretty strongly worded letter dated November 21. Let me just quote from it because it encapsulates to a great extent a number of the concerns that have been outlined by those various organizations through the process of the public hearings on this bill.

"[W]e are concerned with the implications of the application and delivery of the government's intentions." This letter from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School

Board is dated November 21, 2006, and it's addressed to Minister Wynne.

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's "board of trustees has significant concerns about equivalent learning, quality and accountability. We realize that there are currently two credits for accreditation towards a secondary diploma that can be earned outside the school system. These are credits granted by the Royal Conservatory of Music, which has known curricula and evaluation, with a nationally recognized standard.

"Extending credits to other bodies outside the secondary school system causes the board of trustees some alarm. Without known criteria for recognition of what might be considered equivalent standing, the credits might not meet those requirements presently made by secondary schools or by the Royal Conservatory of Music. Without stringent accountability measures in place the notion of 'equivalent learning' has the potential to significantly devalue the OSSD certificate.

"The purpose of the curriculum in place within the education system is to provide employers with identifiable benchmarks for earning"—my margin is cut off here a little bit. The photocopier cut off a word, and that's a big word: "learning" and "earning"; that's a big difference in terms of having a letter cut off—"for learning and transparency in education. Without these parameters, it is our opinion the proposed notion of equivalent learning will lead to educational opportunities that lack structure and rigour." That's coming straight from our school board. "Unfortunately, this aspect of the proposed legislation has the appearance that the government is comfortable outsourcing education." Now, this is from the newly elected board of trustees in Hamilton, who are extremely concerned with the government's wrong-headed perspective that they're taking on Bill 52 on this idea of equivalent learning.

"There are further difficulties. Even with institutions that have known and creditable evaluation practices, such as community colleges, a credit in the college setting is given after only 45 to 55 hours of instruction, not the 110 hours of instruction required by secondary schools."

It goes on to say, "The expansion of opportunities outside of the existing system could have devastating impacts on some optional courses"—devastating impacts—"in schools (music, dance, technology), which would lessen the accessibility of a range of courses available to all students." So in contracting out to these other organizations, in fact what this scheme does is erode the school system's—the existing school board's—ability to maintain programs that are so vital for the rest of the students to be able to participate in, like music, dance and technology. "There is the potential that school boards might lose funding as eight of 30 credits could be provided outside the school system. And there is the possibility that the concept of certified instructors, entrenched in the college of teachers, could be undermined by parallel institutions with unqualified instructors setting up courses outside the school system to obtain equivalent credits for students."

It concludes by saying, "We would appreciate ... if the minister will reconsider aspects of Bill 52 that deal with equivalent learning." Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board "would prefer that the minister achieve these outcomes through the intent of the language of the act by 'building on the creativity and strength of Ontario's education system.'" That, ironically, is in the preamble of Bill 52 but, interestingly enough, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board thinks that those words ring hollow when applied to the government's intention in altering the public education system to allow for equivalent learning credits.

Interestingly enough, many of those very same comments were repeated over and over again by various stakeholders in the process of the public hearings on Bill 52 at committee. In fact, I'm going to just read it out right away in case I don't get any of these specifics on the record. I'm just going to read out a list of the people from Hamilton who showed up here in Toronto to make comments on this bill: Susan Pretula, chair of Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School parent council; Jean Lewis Knight, president of Westdale Home and School—Westdale is where my son goes, Westdale high school—chair, Wentworth parental involvement committee, vice-president of Hamilton-Wentworth Council of Home and Schools; Lee Gowers, Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, Hamilton-Wentworth Council; David Smith, a grade 12 student from Ancaster High School who actually came here to Queen's Park to talk from a young person's perspective—again, very negatively—about this bill. In fact, I'm going to read some of David's comments into the record in a moment. We had Jack Bruce, a teacher in Hamilton; Ryan Scott, a secondary school teacher in Hamilton; Norm Uhrig, a teacher in Hamilton who was bringing comments from another teacher named Sara Waite; Chantal Mancini, who is also a teacher, and she was bringing comments from another teacher named Leisha Dawson; Carmelo Iachelli, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board.

Those are only some of them, but just by indicating those names it's very, very clear that certainly people engaged in public education in the city of Hamilton have significant concerns about what this bill is going to do. In fact, I held a round table on education in the city of Hamilton not so long ago, on Friday, October 20. Again, our critic from the Trinity-Spadina riding, Rosario Marchese, gave us the pleasure of coming to Hamilton to talk to education stakeholders just about the state of education generally. Interestingly enough—maybe not surprisingly, considering how much of a concern this bill is in the city of Hamilton, or at least for the stakeholders in education in Hamilton—Bill 52 came up during that dialogue.

1900

Now, this education dialogue wasn't specifically put together to talk about Bill 52. In fact, it was an effort to sit down and talk to people engaged in public education about what they saw and could identify as concerns in the education system, because we keep hearing from govern-

ment that everything is okay. Of course, if you're not engaged in the education system, you're going to think everything is okay. But in fact, the education round table in Hamilton very clearly showed me that everything is not okay, and one of things that's not okay, amongst many, many others, including the lack of change to the funding formula, the lack of resources for special-needs kids, the lack of funding for things like full-time librarians, art, music and those kinds of initiatives that still do not exist or are not accessible to many kids in many schools—nonetheless, amongst all of the other things that are not okay in Ontario's public school system, Bill 52 came up. It was an issue that was generated by people that participated in the round table.

Here's what they had to say: "Bill 52 takes jobs out of secondary school, permits shifting of up to eight credits to outside agencies.... Eight credits taken out of school" equates to 28 teachers coming out of that school. The effect of this shift is a cost to parents. In other words, people were concerned that as we shift to these outside agencies, these outside agencies or organizations—whatever they might be—may in fact be charging fees to enrol the students in these credit courses, thereby putting a price on the credits and creating another user fee for the parents.

Interestingly enough, we went through a number of user fees that are currently in place, and it was quite clear to see that many parents and families of low means would have difficulty with the existing user fees, never mind the spectre of having more user fees on them. But interestingly enough, the other side of that coin, of course, is that where there's a user fee, there's somebody interested in benefiting from that user fee, hence the very real concern, the very problematic issue, of a slide into the privatization of our school system, which, again, has been raised by a number of teachers as well as school board trustees, parents and students.

The bottom line is, the system is losing kids at risk, particularly those who have special needs. Our teachers were quite concerned about the very obvious loss of some of those specialty schools that the Ontario public school system used to provide, like vocational schools. I remember they existed when I was going through high school as a younger person.

Mr. Speaker, I thought I had way more time. I have my tabs here of all the wonderful quotes from all the great people from Hamilton who came out to speak to this, but I think the best quote is really going to come from—not the best quote; I shouldn't say that. I think it's appropriate to put on the record in this forum the remarks made by the student who made a presentation to the committee, because it's the students' voices that are extremely important in this debate. This is a gentleman named David Smith. He's a grade 12 student at Ancaster High School in Hamilton. He attended committee on Thursday, October 26. Here's what he had to say:

"The truth is, these credits are nowhere near equivalent to that of a traditional high school credit because in quantity and quality, time spent and the actual

effectiveness of the learning or training provided is nowhere near that of a high school level. It is truly inequitable for a student to be able to go to Wal-Mart and stock shelves for 45 hours and get two credits for that, while a student in the traditional system has to work 110 hours in a classroom setting in order to get one credit. Furthermore, the actual amount of work done in these placements is yet unspecified and would likely be far less rigorous than that of a traditional classroom setting."

He goes on to say, "Although many respected institutions are able to provide these courses, they would probably ask for tuition from students. As well, in the Student Success Commission it has been said they would receive funding for each student. That seems a little bit like double-dipping, does it not? The problem with giving the money to these institutions for taking the students is that it would dig into funding for music, sports, fine arts and drama. Keeping 85% of students in school until they graduate is not really worth it when you're taking out of the school system what that 85% stays for."

"The next issue is that students doing work for credit at a third-party employer take jobs away from students who need them."

I found that an interesting perspective. What David is saying is that, yes, you're creating these placements, but at the same time it's making it more difficult for students who are staying in school to find the part-time jobs they need to top up their incomes and be able to save for their post-secondary education. That's a big problem.

David concludes with this: "I sincerely hope that in future students can be made aware and be invited to take part in the decision-making process." This is after he talks about his frustration, that he only knew about this two weeks prior to attending committee.

"In conclusion, I believe that, first of all, we have a right to know about changes to our education. It should be made clear to the students of Ontario. The equivalent credit system proposed by the bill not only takes essential funding out of schools but it allows students to get credits they really don't deserve. There are plenty of programs already in place in school systems in non-traditional learning, and they work, so why mess with them?"

I would say that the government is wanting to mess with them because again they're refusing to deal with a flawed funding formula that simply doesn't let school boards provide the kinds of education and training that young people need. Today, coincidentally, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic school board sent me a copy of a letter they sent to the minister saying, "Concurrent with the board's duty to be as fiscally prudent as possible, the provincial government has the responsibility to ensure adequate funding. The board calls upon the government to increase funding to a level which ensures we are able to continue to provide quality education for today's students."

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? There being none, further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to participate in third reading debate on Bill 52, the Education Statute Law Amendment Act (Learning to Age 18). At the outset, let me say that we pointed out to the government that they had it wrong from the very title of the bill. Learning to age 18 is not something that the government can impose; it's not something that can be accomplished by legislation. What must be achieved through legislation is an appropriate framework within which learning can take place. I believe that the government has learned its lesson, because at the very outset we raised serious objection to the punitive measures of this bill.

When the bill was first released I issued a news release, dated August 29, calling on the government to withdraw Bill 52. It calls on the McGuinty government to withdraw what we called "legislation that is punitive, ill-conceived and will prove to be counterproductive." I said on behalf of the PC caucus that, "The proposed bill would force students to stay in school until the age of 18 and will strip dropouts of their driver's licence." We made it very clear from the very outset that we felt that not only would this bill not achieve its objectives but it was counter to the very principles of learning.

We subsequently went into public hearings, and there was not one submission throughout the entire period of time—in three successive days of public hearings, not one person came forward to support the punitive measures of this bill. I was observing throughout those public hearings the posturing of the members of the government who were there throughout those public hearings. They were very uncomfortable with the notes given to them by the Minister of Education to defend the bill. I won't betray any confidences, but my good colleagues—I have many in the Liberal benches who would share with me their concern over this provision of the bill. But, as good soldiers, they forged on; they continued to give the story of the day about how this bill would serve the students of Ontario well. It didn't matter if it was the teachers' unions, it didn't matter if it was parents, it didn't matter if it was students who came forward, consistently the message was, "Do away with not only this punitive measure of this bill but do away with the entire bill, because it's nothing more than window dressing for a government that is addicted to propaganda." To that end, the bill served the government well.

1910

But in the final analysis, I want to say, as I participate in this bill—and I expect to take my full time; perhaps to the chagrin of the government members, I intend to take the full time that I have to debate this bill. In my remarks today, I intend to draw attention to a number of critically important issues that relate to the education portfolio, to our education system in general, and specifically to the McGuinty government's failure to deal with the most fundamental issue facing the education system in this province today: the education funding formula that

determines how funding is prioritized and allocated within our education system.

I will point out how this government is continuing to ignore the fundamentals of education while pushing forward its propaganda campaign that distorts reality and in fact harms the very stakeholders of our education system: the students, the teachers, the parents and the taxpayers. Specifically, I will talk about the need to update that funding formula, how and why not updating it has put fiscal pressures on school administrations across the province and hampers their ability to deliver the essential education programs that are so important to our students.

I also will discuss how Bill 52, in whatever form it now finally is before the House, is simply more window dressing that does not help but in fact draws attention from the very challenges that are facing teachers, students, school boards and school administrators across this province.

Bill 52, in its earlier form, which included that section to force students to stay in school until 18 or risk being stripped of their driver's licence, was condemned, as I said earlier, by absolutely every stakeholder in this province. But I was there, other members of this House were there, as the Minister of Education defended her colleagues, the previous two Ministers of Education, initially Gerard Kennedy, who initiated this bill, and then Minister Papatello, who had the opportunity to save face for the government with all of the education stakeholders, but who forged ahead. Minister Wynne was now forced to sit in those public hearings and take the abuse from the stakeholders. And even she, in the face of all of the presentations that she heard, continued throughout that period of time to defend why this punitive measure that was being proposed in this bill was going to be in the best interest of students.

I'm pleased to report to people in this province today that, thanks to their objections—because clearly this government doesn't listen to members of the Legislature, and it seldom listens to its own backbenchers. But it wasn't about what I, as the education critic for the official opposition, was saying, because I said this from day one. I want to congratulate and I want to thank the many stakeholders—the parents, the teachers, the teacher unions who came forward, and the students themselves who day after day came forward—who were willing to make presentations to the standing committee, and thank them for pointing out the smoke and mirrors that this bill really represented.

Rather than asking the question, "Why are students dropping out of school?"—which is the right question for any government to ask—this government's Bill 52 had the presumptive and simplistic answer, before they even consulted with students or with teachers or with parents: "Young people drop out because they're lazy and they need to be forced to learn." That was the answer from this government, or, "The driver's licence is so critically important for today's generation of young people that they'll do anything—they'll even stay in school—just to

keep it." That was the attitude of this government. How wrong were they?

What this government was not prepared to do but what became very, very clear as we followed through on our public hearings was that what the government should be doing is looking at itself and asking, "What is the fault with our education system that is causing young people to drop out, that's causing them not to be interested in continuing their learning? What is it about our education system that is demotivating young people? What are the shortcomings of our education system that particularly young people at risk are forced to leave the school system?" Why wasn't the government asking those questions? "What is it that we can do to improve our support systems within our education system that will engage young people and perhaps especially for those young people who are challenged, who are learning-challenged, who perhaps learn somewhat differently than the average student in the class, that perhaps it's not a function so much of learning as it is that they need to be taught differently? What is it about our education system that is starving our school system of the necessary resources so that we can address those aspects of the education system so that our schools and our teachers have the necessary resources to deal with those important questions?" It hasn't occurred to this government or to this Minister of Education to even ask that question.

In a sense, there was a victory over Bill 52. As a member of the official opposition, I'd like to say that this experience was one of the rare moments when I was heartened in the course of this Liberal government's past three years, because there was a win for the public. There was a win for the public because, at the end of the day, their common-sense persistence in challenging this government over this punitive measure in this legislation won out. As a result of that, we're debating Bill 52 today, it having been amended to withdraw that punitive measure.

It caused us a great deal of encouragement when we were able to issue a press release on November 3. The heading of that press release was, "McGuinty Government Folds on Licence Suspensions for School Drop-outs." We gave the credit to the many education stakeholders who came forward in those public hearings to impress on this government how wrong it was. So now it's a matter of saying to the government, "Not only should you have listened to stakeholders on the punitive measure of the licence suspensions; you should've listened to them on the rest of the bill too," because the vast majority of proposals that we have and the vast majority of witnesses who came forward asked them not just to withdraw that measure of the bill but to withdraw the entire bill. Over and over again, we heard, whether it was from teachers, administrators or students, that this bill is simply unnecessary, that all of the alternative learning initiatives this bill purports to establish are already here. In fact, they were established in 1999 by the former PC government under Elizabeth Witmer as the Minister of Education. Under that framework, all of those

alternative learning opportunities were created in legislation. The problem was that the system was starved of the necessary resources and funding to be able to deliver those alternative learning systems effectively.

1920

As I said before, I want to thank all of the stakeholders who came forward and took the initiative. I want to thank those who wrote e-mails, such as Katie Toksoy, who said, "We believe that genuine motivation is self-motivation arising out of a desire to learn and reach goals, not out of fear or coercion or punitive legislation."

I want to thank Gerald Dickson from Kingston, who wrote to his MPP, John Gerretsen, our Minister of Municipal Affairs. He said this: "Acquisition of a driver's licence should depend only on being able to acquire and demonstrate the skills and behaviour needed to operate a motor vehicle safely—nothing more. Legislation such as this increasingly restricts personal freedoms for purposes that are not necessarily in the interests of those it affects."

Al Amos wrote to then-Education Minister Gerard Kennedy, who didn't listen to him either. But Al Amos wrote the following: "One cannot force a youth to stay in school. I believe these students need to get away from the traditional school environment into a system of learning alternatives. Trade schools, working for credits in the job place, co-operatives with employers are but a few ideas."

I want to thank all of the many other education stakeholders, as I indicated before, who came forward to make their submissions and ultimately created such an overwhelming public pressure on this government that they were prepared to allow us to amend this bill to at least withdraw that aspect of the bill. So I say, congratulations and well done to the public in Ontario and in small measure thank the government for at least agreeing to amend the bill on this basis.

Having said that, we will be debating Bill 142 tomorrow. In the course of the debate on that bill, I mentioned at the end of those public hearings last week, on the Thursday, that what was so disappointing about that entire process of deliberation on that bill, as it was with virtually every other bill we have considered under this McGuinty government, is that notwithstanding the many amendments that were put forward by the official opposition and the third party, at the conclusion of that process not one single amendment that came from the opposition was accepted by the government—not one. And yet this is a government that wants to talk about parliamentary reform, democratic renewal, that went to the point of actually appointing a minister with responsibility for democratic renewal. Under the guise of democratic renewal, they want to look at how people are elected to this place. Should we be looking at a new system of how to elect MPPs to this place?

I would say to the government that before you involve yourself about whether it should be a first-past-the-post system or proportional representation, look at this House first. Let's talk about how business is conducted in here. The people of Ontario are not nearly as concerned about how they elect their MPPs as they are with how they

conduct themselves when they get here. The people of Ontario need not be nearly as concerned about whether their MPP is elected by proportional representation or by a first-past-the-post system as, when they get here, will their voice be heard? Will they actually have an opportunity, whether as a government backbencher or whether as a member of the official opposition or the third party—will the voice of that individual MPP be heard in that place? Will the process of committee hearings be legitimized? Will there actually be a day in this Legislature when members of the government who are members of a standing committee will not be under orders from the minister of the day not to think for themselves? Will there ever be a day when members of the government, when they hear an amendment put forward by an opposition member, will actually be able to think for themselves and say, "You know, that makes good sense," and not have to worry about being disciplined by their whip, by the minister or by the Premier because they happened to vote in favour of that amendment because they really believed it made the legislation a better piece of legislation?

I, as a former government whip, know of what I speak. I know that that is how government business is done, and I resent it. I'm simply saying that it's time for us as legislators in this place to change how we do business or suffer the consequences. And the consequences are a cynical electorate, who are staying away from the polls in droves. They don't want to vote because they know in their hearts that voting is often futile.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm sure the member for Oak Ridges is going to relate that to Bill 52.

Mr. Klees: Yes, Speaker. I was relating it precisely to Bill 52, because my point was that while we were engaged in deliberation and debate on Bill 52, we went through second reading debate in this place. The members from the third party who were debating the bill called on the Minister of Education to withdraw the bill, to withdraw portions of the bill. How much were we listened to? Not at all. Then we went into public hearings, and in public hearings, over and over and over again, not only did we hear from the public, but we in the official opposition and members of the third party did the best we could to represent proposals for amendments to this bill. And where are we today?

I gave credit to the government for withdrawing the punitive measure as it relates to drivers' licences, but they did so begrudgingly. So I want to stand here today and give credit—not to us in the opposition, because the government would never listen to us. Had it not been for the persistent advocacy of the public, of education stakeholders, we would not have one change to this legislation. So I believe Bill 52, in one way, was landmark. A very major portion of a piece of legislation was changed, and for that I thank the public.

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The other aspect of the amended Bill 52 that this government is extremely proud of has to do with the provisions for gaining equivalent learning credits. Again,

on that issue alone we heard from many witnesses to the public hearings that they were extremely concerned about the implications of what the government legislation will lead to. The problem with this government initiative is that, frankly, it's no initiative at all in terms of its intent, because the intent is already here in this province.

I would like to share with you what the Ontario teachers' pointed out in their submission to the committee: "... expansion and increase of the availability of equivalent learning opportunities is already possible under Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999."

What the OSSTF and others said they wanted from this government is less political grandstanding in terms of making alternative learning programs available, and what they need is more money to ensure that the framework that was already established in legislation in 1999 could in fact be adequately funded so that those programs could be delivered effectively. But this government chooses, rather than to deliver a cheque, to deliver a bill; in this case, Bill 52. What stakeholders in this province are saying is, "Forget the bill. Give us the money." Fund the programs. Ensure that school boards and teachers have the resources to deliver the programs so that our young people can in fact have the benefit of the good intentions of your Bill 52.

I want to refer to a report on school funding that the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives published in October of this year.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): You are quoting that group?

Mr. Klees: To the government House leader, not only am I quoting this; I gave credit to the government today, Mr. House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: It must be the holiday season.

Mr. Klees: Sure. It is the holiday season. It just shows that some in this House actually have a balanced view of what we're here to do. I am quoting this because I've read the report many times, and I believe that this report states in very clear terms what the issue is in this province with regard to education, and it draws attention, beyond the photo ops that this government is so well known for, beyond the media releases and beyond the smoke and mirrors, and actually goes to the heart of what the issue is in this province today.

I want to point out—and I'm going to read from the report, because I want to be sure to give credit to the author and I want to ensure that people in this province know that this is not a political document. This is an independently researched document that speaks to the funding crisis that we have in the province today.

"What makes the [education] debate particularly difficult to grasp this year is that both sides are telling the truth." This is with regard to the education funding challenge. "The province is indeed spending more. And school boards are indeed facing program cuts to balance their books....

"The principal contributors to this year's funding squeeze are" as follows, and here is the key to what I think people in this province need to understand and comprehend so that they're able to, on the one hand, understand why the Minister of Education can actually stand and say that they've increased funding in education, and, on the other hand, understand why we have school boards across the province facing deficits. I quote from the report: "New provincial initiatives and commitments which require additional spending by boards will increase costs by more than the overall increase in operating funding."

Fundamental to understanding what is happening here is that this government, in the three years that they have had the opportunity to manage the education portfolio, has been drunk with the need to have new funding announcements, new program announcements, every week. There isn't a week that goes by that we don't have a new announcement from the Minister of Education. The problem is that none of those programs, or very, very few of them, have, first of all, been consulted about with stakeholders. They have nothing to do with the fundamental need of education in this province. They are always welcome, and usually the Minister of Education will make those announcements to rousing applause, and often standing ovations. The reason for that is they are always very selective target audiences that the minister speaks to.

So what we've had consistently for three years in this province are dribbles of announcements of \$2 million here, \$5 million there, \$10 million here. Over a period of time, we have an accumulated additional spending of in excess of a billion dollars by this government. But what has been ignored is the fundamental need to update the basic education funding formula that delivers essential funding to students across this province so that special-needs students receive their funding, so that transportation is adequately funded, so that supervision can take place adequately within our schools.

And so we have teachers who are frustrated. Yes, on the one hand, they were given very substantial increases. But isn't it interesting that even the teachers' unions have found it necessary to call news conferences condemning this government—on the one hand thanking them, of course, for new long-term contracts and for infusing an additional \$600 million into the education budget to pay partially for those new contracts, but in the same press conference, those same teachers' unions condemned this government for shorting school boards on many of the essential programs within their schools so that school boards are forced to rob Peter to pay Paul, to transfer funds from special education to shore up those teachers' contracts.

Teachers in this province and teachers' unions don't want anything to do with that. They are simply saying that if you're going to announce new teacher contracts, fund them totally. Don't put school boards into the box of having to meet the requirements of those new teacher contracts that were unilaterally negotiated by the Minister

of Education and then short school boards on the other side with programs so that we cannot adequately fund education in this province. That's precisely what this government has done, and it's catching up to them. There isn't going to be a day of rest for this government until they address the promise that they made. Speaker, you will know what that promise was, amongst a few other promises that the government forgot about, and that was to address the updating of that funding formula.

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I want to deal with the funding formula issue. This is the Report of the Education Equality Task Force. This is a task force that was commissioned by the former PC government to address the issue of the funding formula. It was the former government that introduced the funding formula that was to restructure how education is funded in this province. The objective was to bring equity and fairness into funding of education across the province so that we wouldn't have a situation where students from a wealthy board had advantages over students perhaps in rural Ontario or northern Ontario, where the tax base was not as supple as it might have been in some other areas of the province. So the intention was to provide per-student funding.

At the time that that funding formula was implemented, a great deal of research had been done. It was understood from the very beginning that as this funding formula got implemented, there would be a need for the government of the day to review this funding formula on an ongoing basis to ensure that any unintended consequences that may be negative would be addressed; that as it became evident that additional resources were needed in certain programs, be it transportation, be it capital, be it special needs, there would be an ongoing review. In response to that and consistent with that commitment by the former PC government, this report, called the Rozanski report, was commissioned.

I want to read into the record what the objective of that report was, publicly so stated. I quote from the report, page 3: "The government announced the Education Equality Task Force in its speech from the throne on May 9, 2002. I was appointed"—this is Rozanski speaking—"to review the province's student-focused funding formula and to make recommendations on ways to improve equity, fairness, certainty, and stability in the funding of Ontario's students and schools."

Rozanski goes on to talk about how that report was conducted:

"I also received hundreds of oral and written submissions on a wide range of education and education funding issues from individuals, school boards, and education and other organizations during round table discussions and in public consultations throughout the province.

"Since students are, after all, the focus of Ontario's education funding formula and this report, I am grateful that I was able, while conducting public hearings around the province, to visit some of Ontario's schools and to meet students and their teachers and principals."

He concludes: "Finally, I would like to thank the Honourable Elizabeth Witmer, Minister of Education, for her support and for encouraging me to offer candid advice on ways to improve Ontario's education funding formula."

I wanted to read this into the record because we continue to hear a great deal of condemnation of the funding formula. The condemnation, I suggest to you, should not be directed towards the funding formula, which was a very honest attempt at delivering equitable and fair funding to education in Ontario; the condemnation should be directed towards this government that refused to accept the recommendations of Rozanski and implement the increase in funding that he recommended in his report. I want to make it very clear that the previous government, upon receiving the Rozanski report, made a commitment and began the implementation of the Rozanski recommendations. The fact of the matter is that even Mr. Mackenzie in his report acknowledged exactly that.

So it is not a matter of the report or of the funding formula; it is a matter of a government that chose to ignore a third party, independent report that made very specific recommendations regarding increased need for funding of the fundamentals of education in this province. The government ignored it and chose rather to go on the road with their dog-and-pony shows to increase funding for programs that no teacher called for, that no parent endorsed, that were simply the creation in the minds of some people in the Ministry of Education. For what purpose, we perhaps one day may find out, but I'd suggest that it's for no other purpose than to sell the story of this government; it has nothing to do with the foundations of education. That's the exposure that, over time, this government will get.

I want to refer to a number of other submissions that I've received from people. Again, these are teachers. These are people who are on the front line of teaching in our schools every day. They are appealing to us in the opposition to pull the plug on these road shows that this government is bringing forward.

I want to point out that the education minister claims that the funding formula meets the boards' needs for funding their programs. Yet why is it that the funding deficits continue? Why is it that we continue to hear from school boards every week in this province that they're facing a funding crisis? The ministry's own website—don't take my word for it, members of the backbench; go and look into your Ministry of Education's website—acknowledges that 12 of the 72 boards had deficits in 2004-05. That has nothing to do with the previous government; my friends, that's under your watch. A number of boards have had to resort to accounting acrobatics, robbing Peter to pay Paul, taking from reserves to ensure that their deficits are covered. I ask you to go and talk to your own school boards. Go back to your ridings, my friends. Talk to your school boards and ask how many of them have had to go into their reserves to meet their operating expenses, to meet the shortfalls of the

funding that is committed through your Minister of Education, forcing school boards to spend the money there, but there's no cash coming from the Ministry of Education. Check it out for yourself.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I did.

Mr. Klees: If you did, then you should be lobbying your Minister of Education to come up with the bucks to make sure that there's a match between the commitment that you make verbally and the good tones that you emit during your photo ops and the reality.

Among the flaws of what is happening here by not addressing the Rozanski report—and by the way, I have had occasion to talk to many of those stakeholders. I've asked one simple, simple question—and whether it's school board administrators, whether it is teachers, whether it is representatives of teachers' unions, I've asked this simple question: If the government of the day, if the McGuinty government, were to have implemented the recommendations of the Rozanski report, would we be in the problems that we're in today? The answer is no; the answer is a resounding no.

So one more broken promise, but this one's important, my friends. It's a broken promise that is so fundamental to education. We have a Premier, a self-proclaimed education Premier, who either doesn't understand that the answer is under his nose, that the answer is here, and continues to condone a Minister of Education who says, "We're going to have to review this. We're going to have to study this," or he's simply part of the game. The fact is that the answer is there. Update the funding formula, get it right, and you're going to solve your problems.

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School operations and maintenance are a fact. Today, school operations and maintenance are underfunded by more than \$350 million across the province and \$115 million in two Toronto school boards. Adult credit courses are underfunded by nearly \$125 million in the province. ESL funding in this province isn't appropriately linked to the additional education needs of students whose first language is not English. Funding for students at risk through the learning opportunities grant is today \$250 million below the level recommended by the expert panel whose work established that original grant. These are factual numbers. I don't understand why the minister feels this is such a mystery.

With the reconfiguration of teacher salary benchmarks, there is now no provision in the funding formula for local priorities. Almost every study of education funding in Ontario has recommended a local priorities allocation of 10% of the operating funding, and we have none.

In effect, no action has been undertaken, as I said before, on the Rozanski report, and as a result the elementary and secondary education system in Ontario will continue to operate in an atmosphere of perpetual fiscal stress. For three successive Ministers of Education now to stand in their places day in and day out and say, "There's peace in the valley and all is well in education, thanks to what we've done for education in the province

of Ontario," is without question the greatest story ever sold. Unfortunately, many people in Ontario are buying it, except the people on the front lines who are waking up to the fact that this government is selling and not delivering. That's the problem. The more the front-line people in the service of education are willing to come forward, as they're beginning to, to reveal the truth about this government, the more parents of students will come to understand that every time the Minister of Education shows up in the community to make an announcement, they should read between the lines, because what it probably means is that it's yet one more diversion from the truth.

The funding formula inadequacy means that students with the greatest needs unfortunately are being short-changed in this province. I've spoken about a lot of general issues and one of the issues that I believe the people of Ontario will never forgive this government for is that during the election campaign we heard Premier McGuinty make a promise to parents of autistic children: "Elect me Premier and I will extend funding and support for children with autism beyond the age of six."

Interjection: We did.

Mr. Klees: Even to this day I hear members of the backbench in response to that statement saying, "We did." It shows that they've sold even their own backbenchers on believing that is the case. I will introduce you, sir, to parents across the province who will differ with you, and they'll ask you, "If in fact you did that, why am I mortgaging my home so that I can provide my autistic child with the support that your Premier promised your government would provide? Why is that?" I would suggest to you that what you need to do is to look at the promise you made during the election campaign and now look at what you're not delivering and ask yourself if there is any reason at all why people in this province shouldn't be cynical about government, about politicians, about every time they hear from a member of any government level making any commitment. It's on your shoulders. That's what is on your shoulders.

You know, we can talk about this and justify it as much as we want. The fact of the matter is that the people of Ontario know full well what is taking place. The people of Ontario see it every day, and I really do believe that they're starting to get a sense that this government is much more interested in photo ops and in announcements. This government has learned the art that if you say something enough times with enough conviction, eventually people will actually begin to believe it. But that's not integrity. Integrity is saying the truth. It's one thing for someone to stand up in their place and say, "I would like to be able to do something and we will see if we can," rather than what we heard from these people, and we continue to hear it. We continue to see a defence of the indefensible by this government because they really do believe either that somehow people don't care, people don't listen, people have short memories or, according to what obviously the government believes, "We can do whatever we want and we can get away with

it." I don't think that's true. I think the day of reckoning is coming.

I want to read into the record a comment from Ms. Susan Rab of the OSSTF. She says, "Our membership has grave concerns about the impact of Bill 52. If passed, it will negatively affect student learning and has the potential to undermine public education in the province of Ontario." This is now post the amendment; this is moving on. Understand that we have done away with the punitive measure of this bill. The government has withdrawn that. Now what educators are concerned about is what remains of this bill: that education standards will be, are going to be, compromised by this government, once again a cynical tack on the part of this government to meet their artificial 75% pass ratio.

There are two ways to achieve that, two ways to ensure this irresponsible promise on the part of the government that 75% of students are going to pass—two ways. The first is that you increase the ability to learn, you increase the standards, you increase the teaching methods, you increase the resources into our schools and to the front lines, and with teachers you improve the programs. That's one way.

The other way is to water down standards, and you're right: That's what you're doing. You're watering the down the standards. There isn't an educator in the province of Ontario who doesn't see that, through Bill 52, that's precisely what you're doing. All you have to do, all anyone has to do, is to look at the record, look at Hansard, and you'll see the submissions from educators who are saying that that's exactly what the plan of the government is. You're lowering the standards. You're going to devalue what the Ontario secondary school diploma means. That's what you're doing. You're going to make it easier for people to pass, to get their diploma and, yes, as a result you'll have a lot more people passing. But in the final analysis, in a global world where people are competitive, students don't have to compete with John and Mary down on Maple Street in Aurora; they have to compete with their peers in the next province, in the next state, in the next country and in the country around the world. Those are countries that aren't lowering standards; those are countries and jurisdictions that continue to increase the standards to qualify for their diplomas and for their certificates of graduation.

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At a time when the rest of the world recognizes the importance of the best education money can buy, this government is selling our students down the river, and it's a sad day for education in Ontario.

The chief government whip smiles.

I want you to listen to George Lamoureux of the OSSTF, district 17, Simcoe county: "With the proposed legislation, we would lose precious dollars to outside agencies that offer a program that is less comprehensive and lacks the integrity of the current credit system."

Kelly Morin-Currie, OSSTF, district 23: "The implementation of Bill 52 could lead to a devaluation of the Ontario secondary school diploma and the secondary

school environment in Ontario. No amendments are possible which would adequately prevent the harm caused by the introduction of widespread equivalent learning credits by unspecified and unlimited providers of equivalent learning."

I want to refer as well to a comment made by Donna Marie Kennedy, the president of OECTA: "OECTA believes that Bill 52 is unnecessary and that its goals can be achieved by reforming the basic curriculum documents which provide the basis for granting credits in Ontario secondary schools."

Isn't it interesting that the very stakeholders who advocated and supported unabashedly—and it's their right to do so—the Liberal Party throughout the last election. I don't know how many members of the Liberal Party were elected in the last election because of the support of teachers' unions across the province.

However, here's the interesting thing: My friends, why aren't you listening to the very people who got you elected? You've turned your backs on them. You've changed your principles here. Listen, even the former government did not allow non-credentialed individuals to teach our alternative learning programs. That's why you've brought in Bill 52, so that you can change the framework under which those programs are being delivered in this province. You see, they've caught on. They have caught on to what you're attempting to do here.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Klees: Thank you, Speaker.

Interjections.

Mr. Klees: I don't know why the chief government whip is getting so exercised about this comment, and to the government House leader, I don't understand your reaction. You know what this bill is. You know what you're doing. You know why you're doing it. And you also know that your stakeholders are absolutely right. You also know that you're going to have to answer for the actions you've taken here.

In closing, I want to simply say once again that I believe Bill 52 is landmark in one respect. It's landmark in the respect that we had a piece of legislation that at the outset made no sense—no practical sense. It was a piece of legislation that was put into the window by this government purely for its own partisan reasons. It was an effective centrepiece for them so they could talk a good game, but when the light shone on the details of this legislation, it became very apparent that it had no substance, and the substance it did have was in fact punitive and negative and would hurt education rather than help it—landmark in the sense that the opposition at least was successful in exposing the error of the government's ways; and landmark that the government in fact withdrew that part of the legislation that was so highly offensive; and landmark, I believe, in one other way, and that is that the government refused to go the full distance that its stakeholders called upon them to go, and that is to withdraw the entire bill. From what I under-

stand, what is very clear to me, those stakeholders will hold this government responsible for compromising the very principles on which they got elected. They said one thing; they're doing another. Even in today's cynical world of politics, there is a price to pay for that.

Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I look forward to the consequences of the government's actions resting on their shoulders.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Are there any questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): It's a pleasure and a privilege. I thank Mr. Klees and Ms. Horwath for their comments.

I'd like to pick up on one of the comments that Mr. Klees put before this House. He asked the question, why are students dropping out of school? I would certainly maintain that we're all concerned in this House about that question. Why are students dropping out of school, and in essence, who is the victim of a student dropping out of school? I would assert, and I think we would all agree, that the real victim of the school dropout rate—and we're talking about 30% of students, which is a significant number. Almost 45,000 students, who are covered by this bill, drop out of school before they should. Now, who are the victims here? Clearly, I think we'd all agree the real victims are the students who drop out, the students themselves.

I wanted to share with this House and those who are listening at home a story. I'll call this young woman Jenny. I know Jenny rather well. Jenny left school at age 15, in grade 10. I think her case is very typical; it's not atypical at all. It's typical of the students that I've counselled as a pastor; it's certainly typical of those whom I've worked with in congregational life who work with young people; it's certainly typical of the kind of student, or ex-student, one might find at an establishment like Covenant House. Certainly, I'd like to acknowledge the work of all those counsellors and agencies that deal with those students, many of whom hit our streets in Toronto and become homeless.

This young woman, Jenny, left school at age 15 in the middle of grade 10. Her family life had become a nightmare. Her parents were divorcing; there were loud and raging battles. Before she turned the age of 13, a beloved uncle who lived with them killed himself in front of her. It was a suicide in front of her. Just before she left school, her mother died. She wasn't an unintelligent young woman. This young woman actually got straight As all the way through public school. She was a debating champion in her grade 8 class. She had everything going for her. Now we'd call her post-traumatic. Obviously, there were other issues than laziness or wilfulness in her decision to leave school. This young woman simply couldn't cope.

Now, the answer is what? Is the answer to fine her parents, to fine her? Is the answer to offer up some amorphous equivalent learning program? No. I think anybody and everybody who has compassion in this House

would agree that the answer for that young woman and for many young women and men like her is to have suitable counselling, to have enough educational assistants, to have school psychologists, to have that network of support that needs to be funded, that needs to be part of our school program.

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In fact, if I look at Hansard, I read here from the words of my colleague Mr. Marchese when he was discussing this bill. He said, "You're not dealing with the issue of mental illness unless you provide services. One in five students has a mental illness, and we have decried and attacked the government on a regular basis saying that they need resources, that we need resources. Unless you deal with those issues, those kids are at risk."

I would assert that when you're looking at 45,000 children, or 30% of the student population, and you're looking at one in five children who have need of counselling, there is some overlap there. This bill does nothing to address that overlap.

But I want to walk the listeners through a little bit of the ideology of this bill. How did this bill come about and what happened through the amendment process? Certainly it began as a bully bill. It began as a way of blaming the victim. "What are we going to do if kids drop out of school? Well, we'll take away their drivers' licences. We'll fine them and their parents or we'll fine those employers who try to employ them." I ask you, when I talk about this young woman, in any way would any of those moves help her?

I had the pleasure a couple of weeks back of going to a wonderful place called the Ground Level Café in Parkdale-High Park. This is a group sponsored in part by World Vision. They work with school dropouts, kids who hit the streets in Toronto. They provide them jobs and training and then, hopefully, get them involved in programs so that they can go on to productive lives. The counsellor there shared a story and a statistic with me. He said that 85% of street youth don't want to be on the street. Now that sounds like an obvious assertion, but sometimes I think, and perhaps this government thinks, that it's the fault of the child, because, after all, we're talking about children here. They're children who are 16 to 18 years old, but we know they're still children. We who have young adults as children know that 16- to 18-year-olds often react rather than act or pro-act. He was saying that all of the kids they see, all of the young adults they see who have ended up on the streets of Toronto came from some sort of abuse, some sort of trauma, some sort of problem.

We know, for example, that 40% of students who have special needs, who need special programming, everything from just an ESL course to far more than that, are unable to get it because of lack of funding. I would certainly agree with what's been said before, that really the problem here is a lack of funding in our school system so that we can implement the kinds of programs our children need. There's no question about it.

It started off as this bully bill. Now, some of the bullying has been taken out of it, the threat to a driver's licence. Most of the young people and the children I see on the streets of Toronto, the last thing on their minds is a driver's licence, as if any of them could ever afford a car. However, of course in the rural areas—and I remember as a rural country minister—it's your livelihood. So it's either all encompassingly important or it's not important at all. Either way, it's a very ineffective tool to force a child into school. Most of the children we see on the streets of Toronto have run away from home, so how will fining their parents help get them back into school? You cannot force children to learn. You cannot bully young people into learning.

So yes, I'm pleased that the driver's licence piece was taken out of this bill. Unfortunately, the fines are still there. What have they done? They've simply raised the fines from \$200 to \$1,000. For most of the children I see who have dropped out of school and are on the streets of Toronto or working at McJobs, a \$1,000 fine is laughable to them. They either can't afford it or they wouldn't consider paying it and they'd have to go to jail rather than pay it. This is not an effective instrument for encouraging young people to learn; this is just bullying. This is simply bullying.

Then we get to the real hub of the bill. This is the hub of the bill, and we've learned that both from what Ms. Horwath said and what Mr. Marchese said before, that really the government's not particularly interested in bullying children. It turns out what they're really interested in is contracting out teaching to so-called equivalent learning programs.

Well, here's an example of an equivalent learning program. I'm quoting from the Ottawa Citizen here: "The province has generously included IT call centre workers in the apprenticeship plan"—this is for Dell computers—"subsidizing their wages by allowing Dell to collect a tax credit of \$5,000 per employee for three years. The actual training period for the call centre workers is two to three weeks, Dell says."

So is this the equivalent learning? Is this an example of equivalent learning? Perhaps barista training is an equivalent learning experience. Is that what we're looking at? Is stocking the shelves at Wal-Mart an equivalent learning experience? I mean, of course this is going to degrade the whole concept of education. But you know, there's nothing in Bill 52 that precludes any of that. In fact, it gives the education minister oversight. First of all, as if principals don't have enough to do, they're going to provide oversight for all of these extra equivalent learning experiences. I think most principals, who are so overworked as we speak, will tell you that they've got many other things to do rather than that. But let's say the minister takes it upon herself or himself in the future to oversee this particular aspect of Bill 52. If they do, what will they find and how will they define what is an appropriate equivalent learning experience and one that's not? There's nothing in Bill 52 that speaks to any of that, so we're asked simply to trust in whatever

the minister decides is appropriate or inappropriate, no guidelines provided. I find that distressing. I certainly would agree with our teachers and others, trustees, who also find it disturbing. I find it disturbing that there are no guidelines. Again I quote here, from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, who say, "The scope and delivery of so-called 'equivalent learning' opportunities ... are not exclusively for students at risk. Without clear guidelines, equivalent learning could open the door to outside 'providers,' and the start of a descent along a slippery slope towards vouchers." We have only to look south of the border to see what equivalent learning and what a voucher system gets you in the way of public education. In fact, this is a small step to the privatization of our education system. So let's be honest about it. That's what this is. Bill 52 is a step toward the privatization of a public school system that is now underfunded.

But let me go back, because I know all of our members here are a little bit sleepy at this time of night. Maybe they're not paying attention as they should. So I'm going to go back to my original story, and that was the story of this young woman named Jenny. I want to ask, how could we help this young woman, a young woman who comes from a traumatic background, who leaves school at the grade 10 level? I'll tell you how she was helped. The story has a happy ending, and I know all the members in the House love a story with a happy ending. This story has a happy ending. This young woman was helped in a number of ways. First of all, she was able to access a school psychologist, so she was helped with all of the trauma that led to her leaving school. She was able to access a wonderful social agency called the Fred Victor Mission in downtown Toronto and some wonderful pastoral care, and the name Reverend Zwicker needs to be read into the record in terms of that. Then she was helped by an extremely affordable high school equivalency program offered by unionized teachers in a community college. Of course, this was in the days when you could actually afford to go to a community college if you were on student welfare. She was helped by a welfare system that actually paid her enough to eat and pay the rent and go to the equivalent high school learning experience that was taught by unionized teachers. I'm sure at this point it's not a surprise to anyone in this House to tell you that that young woman was myself and that I'm standing here because of a unionized school system, because of a public school system, because of a social assistance program that was funded and because of tuition rates at the community college that were affordable to someone who had very little money. All of that is gone, and all of that is now totally buried with Bill 52.

So what are we dealing with here? We're dealing with, as I said to begin with, the first step—well, maybe not the first. The first was the funding formula and, of course, some of the things that my colleagues to the right brought in, but certainly this is a large step toward the privatization of what should be a healthy public school system.

What I say in my remaining minutes is that everybody listening to this and all the teachers and all the trustees and all the parents who care about children and care about children at risk, we'll not punish them, we'll not punish their parents, we'll not beat up on the victim or blame the victim, but we'll actually look at the root, the systemic cause of why young people drop out of school and address those causes. And guess what? It costs money.

If this government really cared about the 45,000 students who are dropping out, the 30% who are not finishing school, they wouldn't bring in bully tactics. What they would do is fully fund our school system. They wouldn't bring in so-called equivalent or the door to equivalent learning programs; they'd actually lower tuition at the post-secondary level and provide some real alternatives to students who really want to get an education but can't afford to. They'd reinstate things like school psychologists and education assistants. They'd reinstate all of those extracurricular programs that have been cut, those after-school programs that go into making a whole person—not a half person but a whole person.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): And that's what we're doing in our public schools. That's exactly what we're doing in our public schools.

Ms. DiNovo: Oh, yes. I hear a little bit of flak from my left, but left in seating only.

Mr. Brownell: I know what teachers are doing.

Ms. DiNovo: Clearly people in the House have woken up.

Just to conclude, again, so nobody missed the salient point, if the McGuinty government really cared about children at risk—and we're talking about children at risk—then they would reinstate all of those necessary positions that have been cut from our schools, they'd fully fund our school system, they'd fix the flawed

funding formula, they'd provide post-secondary equivalent programs to students who can't afford them now because tuition rates have been raised 23% to 26%, and they wouldn't open the door to the privatization of what should be a healthy public school system.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Are there any questions and comments? Further debate? Are there any other members who wish to speak to this bill? Seeing none, Ms. Wynne has moved third reading of Bill 52. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

There being more than five—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Yes, I have a lot more than five. Call in the members. There will be a 30-minute bell.

Don't call in the members because I have here a note from the chief government whip. It reads as follows:

"Dated December 11, 2006, to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly:

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on the motion by Minister Wynne for third reading of Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act be deferred until the time of deferred votes on December 12, 2006."

Orders of the day.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 2024.

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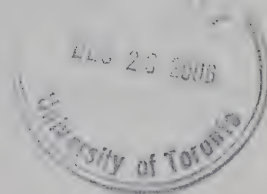
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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**Second Session, 38th Parliament**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**Deuxième session, 38^e législature**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)****Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 12 December 2006

Mardi 12 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. BrownClerk
Claude L. DesRosiersPrésident
L'honorable Michael A. BrownGreffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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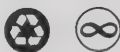
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 12 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 12 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

ESTIMATES

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I have a message from the administrator of the government of Ontario, signed by his own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The administrator of the government of Ontario transmits estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending 31 March 2007, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I rise in the House today to mention more examples of the reckless and uncontrolled spending revealed in the most recent Auditor General's report. Quite frankly, I would just like to review the independent comments being made in the media, just to mention the headlines that this is worthy of receiving:

"Province to Check Hydro One Spending: McGuinty Vows Greater Oversight after Utility's CEO Gets \$3-million Payout" on his severance. The next headline is, "Grits Vow to Rein in Hydro After Boss Leaves with \$3-million Payout." The next headline: "Grits Kill \$1.6-billion Surplus" and go on a spending spree of \$640 million in about a three-hour cabinet meeting. Next headline: "Former Hydro One Chief Drove Luxury Cars on Corporate Tab." The next headline: "Ontario Power Rules Out Gifts for Employees," a little bit too little, too late.

If you want to look at more independent comment, let's look at the Auditor General's report. This report summarizes a number of ministries' misuse of public taxpayers' money. What did they say on health and long-term care? "However, for the program to cost-effectively fulfill its mandate, action is required. These are the auditor's words. He says, "The ministry had still not assessed the relationship between the volumes of services provided by individual facilities and the cost of providing such services to determine whether the facility fees paid to independent health facilities were reasonable."

This report is a damning—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): This past summer the city of Toronto, through the leadership of its utility, Toronto Hydro, demonstrated the impact conservation programs can have. Toronto Hydro's demand response programs managed to reduce Toronto energy consumption at peak times while, in contrast, energy usage in the rest of the province rose to new heights.

Toronto Hydro was the only Ontario utility to target reduction of peak energy use. What it managed to accomplish in the first year of rolling out demand response programs on a very limited scale can be expanded upon with the proviso that the government revamp its energy policy so that energy efficiency and demand response are at the centre, not a sidebar.

The success of Toronto Hydro's programs highlights how the Liberal allocation of three quarters of a billion dollars to the Portlands Energy Centre, a mega power plant that will reindustrialize the city's waterfront, is anachronistic and misguided. Expand demand response, combine that with unharnessed resources and energy efficiency and demand response, and you can make a huge difference to the energy situation in Toronto.

This government needs to invest in and focus on energy efficiency and conservation and abandon its anachronistic approach to electricity.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay–Superior North): There is no question that 2006 was an extremely difficult year for my constituents in the Thunder Bay–Superior North riding. As the forestry sector continued to face enormous challenges on a daily basis, the pressure on all elected officials to find solutions for the industry and the communities we represent became a constant and consuming task.

It is with that in mind that I'm taking the opportunity today to thank our municipal representatives who worked so hard over the past three years to fight against the tide that battered our community. I also want to welcome the mayors, reeves and councillors who have been elected to join this battle for survival for the next four years and to commit to them that I will use all the resources at my disposal as a member of the government to work with them to see the economy turn around.

The fact is—

Applause.

Mr. Gravelle: Thank you—that no community in my riding went unscathed. While we had some triumphs,

notably the reopening of the mill in Terrace Bay and the avoidance of a shutdown at Buchanan Northern Hardwoods in Thunder Bay, there were still several shattering blows to our economy.

So as we move into 2007, I look forward to working closely with our municipal leaders in all the communities in the Thunder Bay–Superior North riding to find ways to reopen mills that are indefinitely shut down, to keep mills open that have successfully fought against the tide and to seek out opportunities for new investments in north-western Ontario. It is by working together that we can overcome these challenges, and working together we will to not just survive, but to thrive in the future.

CITY OF NORTH BAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): What do the McGuinty Liberals have against North Bay? Earlier this year, the Premier popped into North Bay long enough to show the media and those in attendance that he doesn't know the difference between the gateway to the north and Sudbury.

Then last week we had the Premier's right-hand man, the finance minister, Greg Sorbara, going out of his way to say that the skiing in North Bay was not very good, despite the fact that he was not aware they had a ski hill at all. Needless to say, the people of North Bay are none too pleased.

Myself, John Tory and the entire PC caucus know just how wonderful the city of North Bay is. I'm happy to enlighten the finance minister about the grassroots success that is the Laurentian ski hill. The Laurentian ski hill is, in fact, not owned by Doug Newell, as the finance minister seems to believe. Mr. Newell is the hard-working general manager. It is the North Bay–Mattawa Conservation Authority that owns the ski hill. It was saved by a community campaign two years ago, a campaign led by Al McDonald, someone whom I know, and the people in Nipissing know, works very hard every day for the people of North Bay.

As a perfect end to a sad display, the minister, in his remarks, turned down an offer to go to North Bay to actually experience the Laurentian ski hill. All I can say is that it's a shame. Visiting North Bay and experiencing all that it has to offer is never a hardship, and I can assure the people of North Bay that I will be making another visit on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party very soon, and I encourage all Ontarians to make the trip to North Bay.

1340

FAMILY DOCTORS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I recently attended the opening of the first family medicine teaching unit at Credit Valley Hospital. Four residents from the University of Toronto's postgraduate program are now training at Credit Valley's family medicine teaching unit to become family physicians. In a few years, 18 resi-

dents will be enrolled, and all will be serving Mississauga families.

Ontario has been working to increase access to family doctors in western Mississauga. The best way to ensure that we have the right number and the right type of doctors to serve our community is to train young doctors right in our community. That medical farm system is exactly what Credit Valley's family medicine teaching unit is doing. After two years of residency at Credit Valley Hospital, many of these residents will have roots in our community and will set up their permanent practices in western Mississauga.

This is not just an innovative way but the right way to increase capacity in Ontario's health care system. By increasing the number of doctors in the Mississauga community, western Mississauga residents will get greater access to health care services when and where they need it. The family medicine teaching unit is just one of the ways that Ontario is working with the Credit Valley Hospital to bring more doctors to serve our growing western Mississauga community—a commitment made and a commitment kept.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): One of the most offensive and deceptive practices by government departments is ramming through what's left of their budget before year-end to hide the fact that there's a surplus. Now the Auditor General has revealed that the McGuinty cabinet played that game with \$1.6 billion of taxpayers' money at the end of the last fiscal year. "None of these transfers ... had been included in the government's budget for the 2005-06 fiscal year, and in many cases, normal accountability and control provisions were reduced or eliminated...." That according to the Auditor General.

This smoke-and-mirrors bookkeeping leaves the false impression that the government spent \$1.6 billion on public services when in fact none of it was spent. This helter-skelter, thoughtless and offensive shell game to hide \$1.6 billion was going on at the same time as ministers were telling us in this House that there is no money for autistic children, no money for special-needs programs in our schools, for home care for the elderly or for residency positions for foreign-trained doctors.

Just because cabinet ministers played fast and loose with taxpayers' dollars and the fact that it took place in the cabinet office makes it no less offensive than what took place at Hydro One. Perhaps the Premier should be held accountable in the same way that Tom Parkinson was held accountable for his offensive behaviour.

TOYS FOR TOTS

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the Toys for Tots campaign that is run in Thunder Bay by the Thunder Bay Professional Fire Fighters Association. Specifically, I would like to thank its chairman, Bob Vander Ploeg, for

his leadership and hard work. Toys for Tots is an initiative to ensure that all children who are less fortunate receive a gift on Christmas Day.

Toys for Tots has been very successful in our community. This initiative is almost 50 years old and is made possible through countless hours of volunteer work that is provided by off-duty firefighters. It receives considerable support from our generous citizens and from local businesses like Abitibi-Consolidated, its longest-running sponsor. The outstanding donation of 2005 was from MGM Electric. In partnership with their employees, customers and suppliers, the company raised \$8,000, for a remarkable total of over \$60,000 since 1997. That support is also mirrored by our school boards, service clubs, labour unions and many other groups who organize unique fundraising projects and contribute their proceeds to the firefighters' campaign.

In fact, since 1973 Toys for Tots has raised more than \$1.6 million. Last year the campaign raised \$99,000 and used it to coordinate a city-wide mobilization of volunteers to fill and distribute hampers filled with food, including a turkey dinner, to less fortunate families in our community.

"Christmas wishes can come true ... Thanks to you" is the motto of Toys for Tots, and that spirit is front and centre in the Toys for Tots 2001 video history, which was produced by firefighter John Doughty, a 17-year veteran of the Thunder Bay local.

HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I would like to bring to the attention of my colleagues the wonderful service provided by the students of Cobourg District Collegiate Institute West, a school in my riding that I was proud to attend last Saturday. They held a holiday dinner last weekend for people of low income in our community and served over 130 people, the most they have ever served in their eight-year history of providing this dinner.

The Northumberland Youth Advisory Council worked in partnership with the high school, providing a donation of food, including the donation of an entire pig, and got the word out about this great event.

I would ask that my colleagues join me in showing our appreciation for the hard work and the amazing effort of this group of volunteers. I would like to thank Mr. Paul Hicks and Taylor's meats for their generous donation, as well as the Northumberland Youth Advisory Council and staff and students at CDCI West for their continued support of community activities. They have worked very hard for the betterment of our community, and it's initiatives like this one that make Northumberland and Ontario an even better place to live.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I rise in the House today to commend the students of Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School in Orléans for their compassion and generosity this Christmas season.

For 11 years, the students at this school have reached out to those in our community who are in need, making

sure that they have a happy and joyful holiday like everyone else.

One of the caring actions taken by these students is the toy mountain campaign that they have run every Christmas season for more than a decade. They are the only school in the city to run a toy mountain campaign right inside their school. Last year, these students collected 400 toys to brighten the holidays for impoverished children. This year, their ambitions are higher; they hope to donate 500 toys.

Their generosity doesn't end there. The multicultural club at this school has organized additional efforts to help those who are struggling to make ends meet. This club is having each class in the school put together one or two Christmas hampers for families in need. These hampers will include a Christmas turkey, other seasonal food items and toys for each of the children in the needy families. Some of the students will even help the Caldwell family service agency and the Odawa Native Friendship Centre to distribute the hampers.

I commend these students for caring and for their generosity. These students exemplify the holiday spirit. I commend them for giving the best Christmas gift of all.

VISITORS

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm sure members of the assembly will want to join me in welcoming a good friend of mine from my alma mater, Dr. Henry Jacek, and 14 of his students from his fourth-year political science class and the master's program.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would encourage members to join me in welcoming the new mayor of the municipality of Clarington, Jim Abernethy, who is in the Speaker's gallery along with his lovely wife, Cathy, as well as my wife, Peggy, my executive assistant, Sheryl, and my mother-in-law, Elizabeth Woods.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to introduce to the House a gallery full—and some sitting up there as well—of the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas to the House this afternoon.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to welcome Jeff Gillan, executive director of Corso Italia BIA in my riding. He's right over there.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on general government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 130, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities / Projet de loi 130, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les municipalités.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HEALTH SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DU SYSTÈME DE SANTÉ

Mr. Smitherman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 171, An Act to improve health systems by amending or repealing various enactments and enacting certain Acts / Projet de loi 171, Loi visant à améliorer les systèmes de santé en modifiant ou en abrogeant divers textes de loi et en édictant certaines lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The minister may wish to make a brief statement.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'll defer to ministerial statements.

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT (DIRECT ELECTION OF DURHAM REGIONAL COUNCIL CHAIR), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS (ÉLECTION AU SCRUTIN GÉNÉRAL DU PRÉSIDENT DU CONSEIL RÉGIONAL DE DURHAM)

Mr. Ouellette moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 172, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide for the direct election of the Durham Regional Council chair / Projet de loi 172, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités pour prévoir l'élection au scrutin général du président du conseil régional de Durham.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): The bill adds a section to the Municipal Act, 2001, that requires the head of council of the regional municipality of Durham to be directly elected. This being the second time I've introduced this bill, it now has the support of the city of Oshawa as well as the municipalities of Ajax and Pickering, as those communities have held referendums in the last municipal election, having over 86% support in

Oshawa and over 89% support to move forward on the issue in Ajax and Pickering.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Mrs. Bountrogianni moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 and the Executive Council Act / Projet de loi 173, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative, la Loi de 1996 sur le régime de retraite des députés et la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): What about the minimum wage? What about the child benefit claw-back? What about the disability pension?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. The member for Niagara Centre will come to order. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member for Niagara Centre will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I will not warn the member for Niagara Centre again.

Mr. Kormos: It's embarrassing. You throw a quarter to—

The Speaker: I name the member for Niagara Centre, Mr. Kormos.

Mr. Kormos was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1354 to 1359.

The Speaker: Would members please take their seats. Order. I can wait.

All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Peterson, Tim
Arthurs, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Balkissoon, Bas	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bartolucci, Rick	Kular, Kuldip	Ramali, Khalil
Bentley, Christopher	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Bountrogianni, Marie	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
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Brownell, Jim	Marsales, Judy	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McMeekin, Ted	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Chudleigh, Ted	McNeely, Phil	Sterling, Norman W.
Colle, Mike	Meilleur, Madeleine	Takhar, Harinder S.

Crozier, Bruce
 Delaney, Bob
 Di Cocco, Caroline
 Dombrowsky, Leona
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 Elliott, Christine
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 Tory, John
 Van Bommel, Maria
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 Wilkinson, John
 Wilson, Jim
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 Wynne, Kathleen O.
 Yakubuski, John
 Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

DiNovo, Cheri
 Hampton, Howard

Martel, Shelley
 Tabuns, Peter

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 78; the nays are 4.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The minister may wish to make a brief statement.

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: Our province is only as strong as our democracy, and the strength of our democracy depends on the quality of the individuals elected to serve in this chamber.

The Integrity Commissioner cited this principle in his recent report on MPPs' compensation. The Honourable Coulter Osborne concluded that it is in the public interest to ensure that such compensation be fair, that it reflect the important responsibilities of MPPs, and that it not fall so far behind the compensation paid our federal counterparts as to risk having the provincial Legislature seen as a farm team for the House of Commons.

I am today introducing legislation that will bring MPPs' salaries to within 25% of their federal counterparts' salaries. This legislation will also increase the contribution to an MPP's registered pension plan from 5% to 10% of salary. That's about 75% less than what taxpayers pay towards an average MP's pension.

MOTIONS

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting the appointment of the acting chief medical officer of health.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley is seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting the appointment of the acting chief medical officer of health. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that an humble address be presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council as follows:

"To the Lieutenant Governor in Council:

"We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now

assembled, request the appointment of Dr. George Pasut as the acting chief medical officer of health for the province of Ontario as provided in section 81(1) of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, RSO 1990, chapter H.7 and section 28(1) of the Interpretation Act, RSO 1990, chapter I.11, to hold office for a six-month term, having all the same powers and duties of the chief medical officer of health under the Health Protection and Promotion Act; and

"That the address be engrossed and presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council by the Speaker."

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday, December 12, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1407 to 1412.

The Speaker: Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 261. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
 Arthurs, Wayne
 Balkissoon, Bas
 Barrett, Toby
 Bartolucci, Rick
 Bentley, Christopher
 Bountrogianni, Marie
 Bradley, James J.
 Broten, Laurel C.
 Brownell, Jim
 Bryant, Michael
 Cansfield, Donna H.
 Caplan, David
 Chambers, Mary Anne V.
 Chudleigh, Ted
 Colle, Mike
 Crozier, Bruce
 Delaney, Bob
 Di Cocco, Caroline
 Dombrowsky, Leona
 Duguid, Brad
 Duncan, Dwight
 Elliott, Christine
 Flynn, Kevin Daniel
 Fonseca, Peter
 Gravelle, Michael

Hardeman, Ernie
 Hoy, Pat
 Jeffrey, Linda
 Klees, Frank
 Kular, Kuldeep
 Kwinter, Monte
 Leal, Jeff
 Levac, Dave
 Marsales, Judy
 Martiniuk, Gerry
 Matthews, Deborah
 Mauro, Bill
 McMeekin, Ted
 McNeely, Phil
 Meilleur, Madeleine
 Miller, Norm
 Milloy, John
 Mitchell, Carol
 Mossop, Jennifer F.
 Munro, Julia
 O'Toole, John
 Ouellette, Jerry J.
 Parsons, Ernie
 Patten, Richard
 Peters, Steve
 Peterson, Tim

Phillips, Gerry
 Pupatello, Sandra
 Qaadri, Shafiq
 Ramal, Khalil
 Ramsay, David
 Rinaldi, Lou
 Runciman, Robert W.
 Ruprecht, Tony
 Sandals, Liz
 Sergio, Mario
 Smith, Monique
 Smitherman, George
 Sterling, Norman W.
 Takhar, Harinder S.
 Tascona, Joseph N.
 Tory, John
 Van Bommel, Maria
 Watson, Jim
 Wilkinson, John
 Wilson, Jim
 Witmer, Elizabeth
 Wynne, Kathleen O.
 Yakubuski, John
 Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

DiNovo, Cheri
 Horwath, Andrea

Martel, Shelley
 Tabuns, Peter

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 76; the nays are 4.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

HEALTH CARE

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I rise in the House today to speak about our government's proposed health system improvements bill. If passed, this significant and far-reaching legislation would bring about much-needed change in a number of areas in Ontario's health care system.

We've drafted this bill because we want to ensure we give the people of this province greater access to more health care professions, usher in a new era in public health, better protect public safety, and bring more accountability and transparency to the system. With this bill, we will proceed with our agenda for positive change, historic changes first felt here in the Legislature where we are joined today by a multitude of stakeholders who will see themselves and their colleagues reflected in laws that we have had the privilege here to debate.

But make no mistake: Today's bill, if passed, includes changes that are about all of us, changes to keep us healthy, changes to help us if we are really sick. Our bill is a comprehensive one. This simply reflects the complexity of our health care system.

Since coming into office three years ago, our government has not shied away from doing the necessary work to build the system we all refer to, to ensure that the many cogs of our health care system are integrated, to deliver quality care for patients. We were elected to transform the system for the better, and while much has been done by so many in the last three years, our work continues.

Now on to some of the specific changes.

In 2004, in a rare act of unanimity, this Legislature acted to suspend a medical audit system that had lost the respect of Ontario's doctors. Under the guidance of former Supreme Court Justice Mr. Peter Cory, and in lockstep with our partners at the Ontario Medical Association, today's bill introduces a medical review process that will restore doctors' confidence in the fairness of the audit system and provide the public with accountability for doctors' payments.

I'm so pleased to see Dr. David Bach and others from the Ontario Medical Association, who represent Ontario's doctors so well, and I'm glad to welcome them to the Ontario Legislature today. They're in the west public gallery.

In 2003, 44 of our Ontarians were lost to SARS. As the government that followed, we've dedicated ourselves

to learning and applying all lessons and advice of leaders named Campbell, Naylor and Walker.

This bill would establish the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. An independent agency, modelled like the Centers for Disease Control, our agency would bring together academic, clinical and government experts to create a centre of public health excellence in Ontario—public health excellence to keep us well in the first place, and excellence to maximize our protection against known threats and those not yet identified.

No one has been more dedicated to the health of Ontarians than Dr. Sheela Basrur, who is here today in the Legislature with her family. She has been a driving force behind the proposal for this agency, along with other professionals who have worked with her, including people like Terry Sullivan from Cancer Care Ontario and Dr. Michael Christian. They are both with us here today, and they have our thanks as well.

Next, this bill moves to broaden the scope of practice of existing regulated health professionals, brings four new groups under self-government and streamlines the complaints process addressing the concerns of patients.

1420

Specifically, this bill would expand the scope of practice for optometrists, for dental hygienists and pharmacists. Patients would have increased access to services through the safe and appropriate use of these health care providers. This proposal is based on the advice from the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council. Barbara Sullivan, HPRAC's chair, is with us in the east members' gallery.

Our government recognizes that the current process for deciding which drugs can be prescribed by nurse practitioners and some other providers is limiting and cumbersome. That's why this legislation proposes categorizing drugs and then working with the key stakeholders to develop a better approvals process. Again, it is the patient who will benefit as they will have greater access to appropriate care.

We also know that health care providers working in teams can increase patient satisfaction. This new legislation will make the encouragement of team-based care models a basic element of the regulatory college's mandate. As well, through this bill, the regulatory colleges will be able to collect and share key information about the health care workforce to help the government and our partners, in order to be able to make sure that we have the right number of health care providers today and in the future to meet the needs of Ontarians.

I'd like to recognize these individuals, but they represent a much larger group of people. I'd like to recognize specifically Alison Dantas from the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors, Fran Richardson of the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, Naseema Siddiqui of the Coalition of Mental Health Professionals, Gerry Cook of the Ontario College of Pharmacists, and Irwin Fefergrad of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons, who have all worked with the government on this bill.

For years Ontarians have had the benefit of a world-leading air ambulance service staffed by dedicated, highly trained paramedics. By adding critical care land ambulances in designated Ontario communities, Ornge, the new name of our service, will be able to extend their high-calibre care to many of our sickest patients. Patients win, and hospitals and municipal land ambulance services in places like Sudbury will have their loads lightened.

I'd like to recognize Dr. Chris Mazza, the president and CEO of Ornge. He's in the east members' gallery.

Chase McEachern passed away from a heart condition at the age of 11. In his lifetime, though brief, Chase raised awareness about publicly accessible defibrillators. The Chase McEachern act would protect most individuals from civil liability for any damages that might occur from the use of a portable defibrillator in an emergency. This measure builds on the dedicated efforts of our colleague Bruce Crozier, the MPP for Essex, who brought forward a private member's bill with the same objectives.

Each year in Ontario about 6,500 people suffer from cardiac arrest. We know that defibrillators can increase survival rates by up to 50%. Thanks to the good work of people like Chase McEachern and organizations like the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Mikey Network, who work hard to get more defibs into Ontario communities, more Ontarians will have a fighting chance of survival and recovery. I applaud their efforts and hope that everyone will join with me in recognizing Chase McEachern's family, who are here in the east members' gallery with us today.

As I said at the outset, these are the highlights of our government's proposed Health System Improvements Act. Ultimately, what's important to bear in mind is the wealth of improvements this bill would bring for Ontario's patients. The proposed legislation is part of our government's overall plan for innovation in health care and for building a health care system that delivers on three crucial priorities: keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to nurses and to doctors. I look forward to the passage of our proposed Health System Improvements Act.

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): Today I rise on a very historic day for the province of Ontario. Today mandatory retirement is eliminated in this province.

A little over a year ago, this Legislature voted to end mandatory retirement. At that time, a one-year transition period was included to give Ontarians time to get ready for the change.

On December 12 last year, the Lieutenant Governor gave royal assent, and so today, one year later, there is no more mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario.

It was the right thing to do one year ago, it's the right thing to do today and it's the right thing to do for today's society.

The journey to ending mandatory retirement began in June 2001 when the Ontario Human Rights Commission released a paper entitled *Time for Action: Advancing Human Rights for Older Ontarians*. In it, the commission stated that mandatory retirement policies undermine the dignity and sense of self-worth of older workers.

I want to thank people like Keith Norton, Mike Colle, Carl DeFaria, Chris Bentley, Lillian and Murray Morgenthau, co-founders of CARP and, as advocates for this legislation.

Premier McGuinty demonstrated very clear leadership and made it very clear that he did not want to have a policy that undermines the dignity and sense of self-worth of a large segment of our population. It wasn't fair, it wasn't right, and today it no longer exists.

Today, we are here to give Ontarians freedom, the freedom to choose to retire or not retire at the age of 65. Today, we are here to say to people all across this province, "Do you want to continue to work?" Well, now you can. "Do you want to continue to contribute in the workplace?" Well, now you can. "Do you want to continue to earn your livelihood?" Well, now you can.

Today, the law puts an end to mandatory retirement, and that takes effect here in the province of Ontario. Today, thousands of Ontarians will have the choice of whether or not to retire; that choice will be theirs to make. Starting today, citizens of this province will be able to decide for themselves whether or not to continue working past the age of 65. Some may ask, "Why would they want to work past the age of 65?" For many reasons: Some workers decide to retire based on lifestyle, circumstances and priorities—the decision may be personal or practical—and some people want to continue working because they want to continue working. As of today, they have that right.

People today are living longer, more active lives. Many people still have a keen interest in their working lives. They believe they still have much to contribute. As of today, they have that right.

The age of 65 was an artificial construct—it always was. Winston Churchill was born in 1874. That means that he turned 65 in 1939, at the very start of World War II. Still ahead lay for him the brilliant leadership of Britain during that war. It's probably a good thing that the British public didn't say to him, "Okay, Mr. Churchill, you're 65. It's time to step aside."

Are we to say to Margaret Atwood, who turned 65 in 2004, "That's enough; put down your pen; no more writing for you"?

For ongoing influence and significance we only have to look to the city of Mississauga and the enthusiastic, fireball mayor, Hazel McCallion. She is 85 years old. This past November, the residents elected her to her 11th term. They clearly recognized in Mississauga that age was not a factor.

Astronaut John Glenn orbited the earth in 1962. In 1998, he went back into space aboard the space shuttle at the age of 77.

The sum of 65 years does not mean it's over.

Employers' and employees' organizations have spoken to me about their concern over a coming workforce shortage. The end of mandatory retirement now gives them access to a highly trained, highly motivated new source of labour. They can tap into their own employees. This is a good thing for employers, this is a good thing for employees and it is the right thing to do.

Human rights in this province have taken a great step forward today. Today, we are seeing Ontario adapt to changes in our society. Today, we are fulfilling the promise we made. Today, there is no more mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): In 2003, the Progressive Conservative government introduced an amendment to the Ontario Human Rights Code to eliminate the last vestige of state discrimination in Ontario, that of age. Three long years later, the McGuinty government followed that lead, effective today.

The Progressive Conservative caucus, under the leadership of John Tory, wishes well any senior who takes advantage of their new freedom to work and share their valuable experience with our community, province and country.

1430

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I'm going to respond to the health legislation. Obviously we're very pleased that this legislation has been introduced. Many of these recommendations are long overdue, whether it's dealing with the public health agency or the Cory report or the response to HPRAC. So we are pleased that the legislation is here today.

Having said that, I think the first thing that causes some great concern is the fact that this is an omnibus bill. As somebody said to me, it is a monster bill. It is immense. I think it has caught many people by surprise in that it amends 42 diverse acts. Certainly the packaging and the scope of the legislation is very surprising. The legislation probably has the potential to involve the largest number of stakeholders ever in any bill.

I have some concerns about the timing. We are nine months away from an election and I really wonder if the government has introduced it so late that there's no intention for it to pass before that time. I think it's really important that we take a look at what is contained in here and, if we're going to protect the public, that we do allow the public ample opportunity to analyze this bill. It is huge.

I know the minister has highlighted some of the main points, but in any omnibus bill you also have to be very suspicious as to what may be contained therein that has not been carefully analyzed or—

Interjection.

Mrs. Witmer: You're right.

Anyway, let me begin first with the Cory report. This report was released in April 2005. We've not had an

audit system in place since that time. If this bill does not pass in the spring and it's held over until the next election, it's going to be almost three years. The Minister of Health promised a response by the summer of 2005 and now we're seeing it about 18 months later. The response is actually buried in this extremely huge bill. I do believe that report deserved a more timely response. Of course, the Auditor General just recently spoke to that as well and he criticized the lack of an audit system in his report.

The new public health agency: We've heard many experts over the past few years indicate the need for this agency. We have this recommendation now for an agency, but there is little meat on the bone. We know that we don't have enough health professionals in Ontario at the present time. We're now going to be requiring more individuals, so this is certainly a huge concern. By the time this agency is set up, it's going to be beyond what a spokesperson for the minister said at one time, that this was going to be up and running in short order.

If we take a look at the fact that a lot of our public health units—in fact, 12 of the 36—are without a full-time medical officer of health, it just emphasizes the fact that we don't have the human resources to staff what is being proposed here. We are not at the present time appropriately staffed and resourced and fully integrated with the rest of Ontario's health system.

If you take a look at HPRAC, HPRAC came out with a huge 300-page report and now the responses to that report are buried in this huge bill. We just spent a lot of time on one college and now we're going to spend very little time—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Responses? The member for Hamilton East.

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have to say I'm responding to the Minister of Labour's marking of the ban on mandatory retirement today. I still have to try to figure out in my mind why it was so absolutely necessary to make this a priority. In fact, the minister used Margaret Atwood as an example of someone who might be turning 65 and all of a sudden her pen is going to have to drop. That's just passing strange because we know there are many Canadian authors who have been—actually, some even started their career after the age of 65. So we know darn well that he was really being facetious when trying to indicate that the ban on mandatory retirement is going to have anything to do with people like Margaret Atwood.

Nonetheless, what I really think is important today is to mark the fact that most workers in this province want to retire early; they don't want to work until they drop. But the problem is that most workers would prefer to see that retirement in dignity with a pension so that they don't have to live in poverty. In fact, 60% of Ontarians are not covered by workplace pension plans of any kind, and 83% of workers in the private sector who do have

pension plans have no inflation protection on those plans, so they do end up retiring into poverty.

The government created a task force recently on pensions. Unfortunately, they forgot to include in the mandate of this task force the very fact that most workers in Ontario are not even covered by pension plans. So the very task force they set up doesn't even deal with the most important issue, which is that most people don't have pensions. That's the biggest problem that the workers in Ontario face. Unfortunately, the McGuinty government disagrees.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In response to the Minister of Health's announcement, I want to say that this is an omnibus bill, make no doubt about it. Here is the copy before printing. The Liberals in opposition used to be against omnibus bills because, as they used to say, these were attempts by the government to throw everything in the pot, everything that the minister or the government had made a promise about but had never gotten out the door in a timely fashion. That's exactly what's happening here.

Justice Cory released his recommendation on a new audit process in April 2005; here we are, in December 2006, only now seeing amendments to make the changes he proposed. The government itself indicated that there was going to be a new agency on health promotion and health protection in June 2004; here we are, in December 2006, only now seeing the legislation to create that.

This is a really bad way to deal with important policy issues, especially health issues, especially ones that are going to have a big impact on key stakeholders, patients and the public. The way this is being done is virtually going to guarantee that important health policy issues that many individuals and organizations spent a long time dealing with—including HPRAC, Justice Cory etc.—are going to get short shrift because we are up against a timeline. Everybody can see that and everybody can see that the time for debate and public hearings is going to be significantly reduced as a result of that timeline.

I want to highlight several concerns. Number one, with respect to the agency for health protection and promotion: David Naylor, in his final report, said that this agency was going to need an operating budget of at least \$45 million, over and above the base budgets from the public health labs, and a capital budget of \$35 million. The question is, is the government going to put that money on the table to ensure that this agency can be created?

Secondly, with respect to the public health laboratories, the task force also said that before any transfer to the agency, there had to be a very well-developed human resources plan that was agreed to by all parties and the immediate establishment of a transition team to aid in that planning. We need to see those things in operation now, because it is clear that the laboratories are going to transfer to the agencies.

I'm really concerned about the funding for public health units because the amendments in the bill transfer current responsibilities of the Ministry of the Environment around inspection of water plants and small water plants to the public health units without any transfer of funds or human resources to do that. We already know that the public health units wrote to this minister in October 2006 pointing out the many, many jobs that were not created in the public health units because of this government's cap on public health funding in 2006. Where are the resources going to come from to allow the public health units to deal with this new responsibility?

With respect to the regulation of psychotherapy that has been proposed, the minister knows, because he and many others have received many letters from people who are concerned about regulation of mental health services generally—I hope that the provisions in this bill will allow for that, because otherwise the public will not be protected and many people who receive counselling services in northern Ontario and remote areas will have that access denied.

Finally, with respect to the audit provisions that are in the bill, these have to respond to what Justice Cory recommended. The former MRC process was badly flawed; it led to tragic circumstances and consequences. Any new process must really ensure that there's a fair audit process in place with an appeal mechanism.

VISITORS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I'd like to recognize two wonderful individuals from Thorncliffe Park in my riding of Don Valley West: Thillai Sinnadurai and Lathina Sinnadurai, his grade 4 student who's very interested in politics. Welcome to Queen's Park.

DEFERRED VOTES

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (LEARNING TO AGE 18), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (APPRENTISSAGE JUSQU'À L'ÂGE DE 18 ANS)

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning / Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant l'apprentissage des élèves jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans et l'apprentissage équivalent.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1440 to 1445.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Peterson, Tim
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bountrogianni, Marie	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Mauro, Bill	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McGuinty, Dalton	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Van Bommel, Maria
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Watson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	Wilkinson, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David
Duncan, Dwight	Patten, Richard	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Prue, Michael
Barrett, Toby	Marchese, Rosario	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Martel, Shelley	Sterling, Norman W.
DiNovo, Cheri	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tabuns, Peter
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Tory, John
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 61; the nays are 27.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

SHEELA BASRUR

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes to recognize Dr. Sheela Basrur.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of Health Promotion.

Sheela Basrur came to the service of the people of the province of Ontario at a time when service was very much needed. The circumstances for our new government were clear: We had come to office and Ontario's public health system was seen to be in need of a major revamping.

In our province, 44 of our people had perished in a circumstance which we can all call SARS, but for many

of us was subject to so much consumption of daily media and so much searching within all of that media for people in whom we could have confidence in trying times. For so many people, Sheela Basrur was the public face of SARS. She was that voice in difficult and desperate times who offered reassurance when, frankly, many of us had a difficult time finding reassurance.

1450

We were very much privileged to be able to ask Dr. Basrur to come and join the service of public health in the province of Ontario by assuming the joint responsibilities of chief medical officer of health and assistant deputy minister in the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. In the two and a half years since, she's launched a review of 36 public health units and laid the groundwork for extensive examination of programs and services delivered by public health units. Sheela Basrur's leadership, fingerprints, valuable advice and direction are found in significant elements of the bill that I'm privileged to have stand in my name and that has been brought to this House today.

We were all struck, I think, by the irony of circumstance quite recently when Dr. Basrur indicated, in her penultimately powerful way, without any hesitation, to put in the public domain the most personal of circumstances. I know how many members have been touched, because I have been fortunate, if you will, to be their conduit. So many people have come and said to me, "I want to make sure that I reach out and let Dr. Basrur know just what a degree of respect we have for the dedication she's brought, for the professionalism she's brought." I know that all members of this House, and indeed all Ontarians, whether they've had the privilege, as we have, to have been touched by her so personally or whether they've only experienced her through television, wish her Godspeed—on the basis of all those Ontarians to this one very accomplished public servant who has done so much for all of our health—and best wishes as she seeks to dedicate herself, with the level of dedication that she has and that few of us can muster, to the subject at hand, which is her own health. Accordingly, I'm privileged to offer on behalf and alongside all members our very, very best wishes, our love and our gratitude.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I join my colleague the Minister of Health in thanking Dr. Sheela Basrur for her leadership and commitment to health promotion and public health. In fact, she helped shape the very foundation of our ministry's work. Despite being perhaps one of the busiest people in the public service, Sheela always made time to listen, to teach, to share her ideas and advice, and to demonstrate a profound commitment and passion for creating a province in which everyone can be healthier.

Dr. Basrur has a deep understanding of the complex issues related to the social and economic determinants of health and has helped others understand the impact that these have on the health of Ontarians and the need to work collaboratively to improve the health of the population.

Let me just talk about two signature items.

Smoke-free Ontario: Dr. Basrur was instrumental in the development of the government's tobacco control strategy. She chaired the community action working group since its inception last year and guided the development of the SFO strategy in concert with all of Ontario's major health partners. She also worked with public health units across Ontario, helping them to understand the impact of this legislation.

Healthy eating and active living: Her report in 2004 entitled *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives* sounded the alarms about the serious issues related to obesity and the lack of physical activity. In the report, Dr. Basrur set out a plan to promote healthy weights in Ontario, and the result was the healthy eating and active living action plan, the provincial government's response and the first plan to integrate the two key risk factors for obesity and chronic disease: poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

She cared very much about our First Nations and led the development of a protocol with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and represented the province at the signing ceremony in Thunder Bay.

Sheela has a rare combination of skills and characteristics that make her a charismatic and dynamic leader and a compassionate human being. We've been extremely fortunate to have worked with her and learned from her. We sincerely appreciate the humanity and compassion she has brought to her post and to everything she's been involved with. We wish her Godspeed with her next challenge and thank her for her dedication to the people of the province of Ontario. Thank you, Sheela.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): It is a pleasure and an honour to pay tribute today to Dr. Sheela Basrur on behalf of my leader, John Tory, and my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative caucus.

I first had the privilege of meeting Dr. Basrur when I was Minister of Health. Of course, she was serving as the medical officer of health for the city of Toronto. I soon learned that she was one of the most sincere, hard-working, energetic and dedicated health professionals I had ever met. In fact, she truly was dedicated to the cause of health promotion and keeping individuals as healthy as they possibly could be. She was also very committed to promoting women's and children's services. I was pleased to be involved with her when we did our tobacco strategy and also when we introduced heart health.

One other thing that always impressed me, and I know my staff used to talk about this as well, is that when Sheela decided to undertake a task and focus on an activity, she was able to motivate and inspire the people around her—in fact, the people in the entire community—to work with her. She was able to recruit and retain many well-qualified and talented health professionals, who helped her to achieve the goal of keeping individuals as healthy as they possibly could be.

She has many achievements, but certainly I think one of her greatest achievements occurred during our time of office, and that was her strong performance in what were then uncharted waters during the SARS outbreak. This brought her to the attention not only of people in

Toronto, Ontario, and across Canada, but to people in the world. She certainly earned the respect and admiration of people far and wide for the very extraordinary leadership she exhibited. She was always that calm, reassuring voice of reason who provided easily understandable information to a very nervous population.

I was pleased—I think we were all pleased—that shortly after, she was appointed by the McGuinty government to become the chief medical officer of health for the province, where she leaves to this day a very strong legacy.

She can be very, very proud of her work on the anti-smoking strategy—certainly it is one that is most unique to North America—her efforts to combat obesity, and the focus that she brought to fighting the challenges of air pollution and the need to make sure that we in this province were prepared for any future flu epidemic.

I could go on and on, and some of her accomplishments have already been spoken to. But I decided to seek out some comments from those people with whom she worked most closely: her fellow medical officers of health. Dr. Robin Williams was kind enough to send some of those comments to me. Although they acknowledge that they were still reeling from your announcement, they were delighted to share, in some way, in paying tribute to you, Sheela. This is what they said:

She was “a mentor and role model to young women entering the field of public health in demonstrating that strong leadership can come in unexpected packages, and that as a woman it is possible to command a great deal of respect and get the job done in an exemplary way through compassion, listening, decisiveness and competence.” She was able to teach others, and was always willing to share “her knowledge and experience.”

Another said, “Her leadership has inspired the trust of” Ontarians “as well as the trust of her colleagues” in knowing she will always safeguard the public's health.

Another said, “Her ability to deal with us, a fractious lot of medical officers, in a steady and often gently humorous way, while building consensus, commitment and passion for a vision of public health in Ontario has always been exemplary.”

And yet another: She has a “sharp intellect—cool under fire and an extremely gifted communicator.”

And yet one more: She is “able to make and take decisive actions, in the most difficult of situations, with the wisest of judgment—the latest public example being her approach in these past few weeks to the challenges of her personal health, while making provision for the best interests of the health of the public.”

1500

Yes, Sheela, you have truly earned the respect not only of your own colleagues the medical officers of health and of us in this House, but I can truly say that anybody I have talked to in recent weeks has spoken of you in a manner that I've never heard before. You are a pioneer in public health. You are a truly remarkable and courageous person, daughter and mother. You have exhibited grace in times of tremendous pressure.

I want you to know, and I know I speak for many Ontarians, that you will be front and centre in our hearts over this period of treatment and recovery. We wish you well in your fight against cancer. Our support, our prayers and our love go with you and your daughter, Simone, and your parents.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): As the third speaker today, I suspected that by the time it was my turn to speak, the many and varied accomplishments of Dr. Basrur would have already been listed and read into the public record, and indeed that has been done, so there is nothing more I could add to make those accomplishments more meaningful than they have been publicly today. Instead, I'd like to offer these two thoughts to Dr. Basrur, and I trust, Sheela, that you'll accept them in the spirit in which they are given.

First, my mom has beaten cancer, not once but twice. The first time she had a bout with cancer, I was only eight years old. I don't have much recollection of that first fight. I do remember much more clearly five years later when she was given a clear bill of health after having been monitored for those five years.

The second time she fought cancer I remember much more clearly, because it only happened three years ago. On December 27, my brothers and I and our families were at home for Christmas when my mom received the results of her biopsy. She had a very aggressive form of breast cancer, and there was nothing that struck fear into all of us more than hearing that message.

My mother, who was much more courageous than all of us, said very clearly, "I have much to live for, and I intend to do just that." She had a mastectomy and three years later is still being monitored, but things are good. I share that story with you because I have learned to always have hope, and as you face this current challenge, I trust that you will have hope too.

The second thing I want to say is that I'm not a betting person. My one and only experience with a casino in Ontario occurred 10 years ago at the then interim casino in Windsor, where I parted company with \$40 in about 10 minutes. Having said that, if I were a betting person, my money would be on you. There is no one I know who, given your otherwise good health and very positive attitude, could give cancer a run for the money in the way that I know you are going to. I know that with the support of your parents, who are here today, and your daughter, you will face this newest challenge with the same kind of focused, disciplined and unwavering commitment that you have faced so many other challenges, not the least of which was the SARS crisis.

In conclusion, I want to thank you on behalf of the Ontario NDP, I want to thank you personally for the enormous contribution you have made to public health in the province of Ontario, and I look forward to your continuing to make an enormous contribution to the public in Ontario when your personal health allows you to best do so. Godspeed, and all of our thoughts are with you.

Applause.

VISITORS

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to introduce two individuals who work for a company that resides in my riding: Don Rippert, the chief technology officer, who is visiting us from the United States; and Darren Nippard, the head of government services, Canada, for Accenture, a very dynamic technology company that does business with all levels of government.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. It seems that the litany of waste and abuse of taxpayers' money runs wild through every nook and cranny of the Dalton McGuinty government. Whether it's millions on hotel rooms for the ministries of education and health, \$163 million at Hydro One with no receipts or \$60,000 SUVs at the children's aid societies, the government seemingly can't help itself when it comes to treating the taxpayers and their money with contempt.

The Auditor General confirmed that the government itself is a big part of the problem, as reported today in the Toronto Sun. In a few short cabinet meetings at the very end of the year, you spent hundreds of millions of dollars without proper controls, exactly the same thing as was found at Hydro One: spending money without proper controls.

When are you going to stop treating the taxpayers' money like it is play money and start insisting that all of the rules be followed all of the time in all circumstances, without exception?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To state the obvious, I take issue with the leader of the official opposition's characterization of past events and our management of the public's money. I think what he really objects to is the fact that, yes, we did invest significant dollars year-end. We put \$670 million into a subway expansion; he objects to that. We put \$65 million into the Mississauga transit system; he objects to that. And we put \$95 million into the Brampton transit system; he objects to that.

We had a choice with respect to whether we should be using \$400 million at year-end to invest in roads and bridges, and to help our municipal partners manage those heavy challenges. We could have paid down the debt, I guess, or reduced the deficit further. But we thought we owed it to our municipal partners to help them out. The leader of the official opposition objects to that. What he's really saying today is that it's not so much the process he objects to; it's the fact that we continue to make the kinds of investments the people of Ontario need.

Mr. Tory: Actually, the Premier has it wrong. What I object to is the complete contempt you show for the rules

that govern the expenditure and safekeeping of the taxpayers' money. That is what I object to, and that is what a lot of other taxpayers object to. You treat this money like you can do anything you want with it, and people object profoundly to that. You treat it like you're on some kind of all-expenses-paid shopping spree. You just go around and grab anything you want—forget the rules.

Here is what the Auditor General had to say: "In many cases," referring to this year-end spending, "normal accountability and control provisions were reduced or eliminated...." That's what he said. The McGuinty government is just as guilty, in those words, of skirting the rules as were the people at Hydro One who spent without proper controls.

You made a solemn commitment to fix things up, change the rules and show some respect. Are you just going to continue with these spending sprees and ignore the rules like you did in handing out the \$3 million, or are you going to do something to address your own recklessness?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, Speaker, as I'm sure you would surmise, I cannot agree with my friend opposite when he says that investing \$670 million in subway expansion is part of some irresponsible spending spree.

Earlier, I listed some of the things we invested in, but there are many more. We chose to invest in the future of our farmers with a \$125-million payment to grain, oilseed and horticulture farmers. Now, he may characterize that as part of a spending spree; we see it as providing essential support to our farmers.

We chose to invest in cultural centres; the party opposite voted against that. That's \$49 million to support the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Ballet School, the Royal Conservatory of Music, the Canadian Opera Company and the Gardiner ceramic museum. Again, the leader of the official opposition may characterize that kind of investment as part of an irresponsible spending spree, but we see it as a good investment made on behalf of and for the people of Ontario.

1510

Mr. Tory: The fact is that every single one of those projects and initiatives could have been undertaken and the rules followed at the same time. You don't have to do those things and break the rules.

March 9 cabinet meeting, \$432 million: That's \$2.4 million a minute. March 23 cabinet meeting, \$640 million: \$3.5 million a minute. March 30 cabinet meeting, \$205 million: \$1.4 million a minute. According to the auditor—not me—no accountability, not following the rules, relaxing or eliminating the controls on taxpayers' money.

The auditor is critical of this kind of recklessness. Taxpayers are worried that you're going to embark on another wild spending spree to try and buy the next election. Will you commit here and now to take the auditor's words to heart and to follow the rules and the controls without exception every single time you're going to spend one dollar of taxpayers' money? Will you commit to doing that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me just say that we will always be respectful of the process. But where my friend and I part company is in terms of the end that we have in mind. He categorizes investment in public transit, investment in the future of our farmers, investment in our cultural centres, investment in our public libraries, investment in research and innovation as being part of some kind of an irresponsible spending spree. We see things differently. We will always be respectful of the process. At the same time, we are equally determined to make the kinds of investments that we've made in the past, the kinds of investments that are meaningful to the people of Ontario, that enhance their prosperity and improve their quality of life, and we will not shrink away from fulfilling that responsibility.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question, the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: My question is to the Premier. The auditor points out as well that none of the money has actually been spent. He says that right in his own report.

In any event, the Auditor General's report, if you keep going through the pages, is a nightmare before Christmas for Ontario taxpayers. Every turn of the page has another horror story on their hard-earned dollars getting misused and abused.

Now we've seen a real problem, not confined to any one place, with people dining out on the taxpayers: hydro employees, school board employees, children's aid employees, money spent on fancy meals—\$100 per person, \$130 per person of taxpayers' money, money that should be going to classrooms and vulnerable kids. You have guidelines for government employees: \$40 a day total for meals, no more than \$20 a day on any one meal. The Minister of Education says she sent a note out in her area. Have you bothered to send a note out or issue any directive at all to the broader public sector saying there are guidelines on this, they must be adhered to and we are not going to have people dining out on these kinds of monies across the public sector, money that's meant for education and kids? Have you done that?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It's interesting to note that virtually all of the references to misspending just made by the leader of the Conservative Party were the kinds of events that were discovered as a result of us providing new authorities to the Provincial Auditor. Had we not done so, he never would have discovered those kinds of things.

We are proud of the fact that, as a government, we believe in true transparency and accountability; proud of the fact that we've extended the ambit of authority for the Provincial Auditor; proud of the fact that he has seized those new opportunities and is now looking at our school boards, our colleges, our universities, our hospitals, OPG, Hydro One and children's aid societies; proud of the fact that he's making specific recommendations to those bodies after he looks into them. Also, I've taken the opportunity—and the leader of the official opposition will know this—to tell the people of Ontario that there's a new standard, a new and higher standard in place.

There's more transparency, there's more accountability, there's more responsibility, and we all have to act responsibly when it comes to—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Tory: I guess it's the same transparency we saw with Mr. Parkinson. The fact is, you can make all of the statements that you want, but if you don't do anything about it and say to people, "We're going to enforce new rules and impose new rules," it doesn't matter.

Another potential leakage in this nightmare of horrors before Christmas is the leakage of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money that comes from the auditor's findings. There are 7,000 cases of possible improper use of OHIP cards in a 10-month backlog. The auditor says 40% of those cards historically have been found to be ineligible. That's 2,800 cards. If you assume each of those 2,800 cards spent \$2,800 on health care, which is a commonly used number, and the backlog gets bigger and bigger, that's \$8 million of taxpayers' money for health down the drain. Your government's response to the Auditor General in the report is to say that you "will review business processes." Why can't you move quickly? Why won't you move quickly to get the resources in place even temporarily to get rid of these cheaters and stop this gross misuse of the taxpayers' money? Why won't you do it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The honourable member made up a lot of numbers there, had a lot of hypotheses, but at the heart of it, we understand that the auditor has given us good advice with respect to the circumstances related to OHIP cards. The honourable member, for the purposes of a question, likes to pretend that he doesn't know about the improvement that has been made, even since the report began in December 2005.

Indeed, today's bill, the health system improvement bill, contains even further legislative capacity on the part of the government to ensure that Ontarians are keeping up to date with all of their information on the card; that is, if they move, that they fulfill their obligation to apprise officials and to get new cards as required.

We take everything that the Auditor General says seriously. We're working diligently in the ministry to improve on circumstances, and, indeed, last week in the House I indicated the level of improvement that has already occurred. But we're restless and relentless to drive further change and improvement forward and, accordingly, we will.

Mr. Tory: It's certainly amusing to hear from the minister of made-up numbers about made-up numbers on the part of other people.

Another example from the Nightmare Book Before Christmas is over at OPG, and my question, of course, is to the Premier. They approved \$498,000—properly—on renovations to the corporate offices, and then that renovation ballooned to \$1.8 million without any competition or documentation at all. The auditor identified in the very same report in a different chapter literally hundreds of

publicly owned buildings that were either in poor condition or defective condition, but somehow they find \$2 million, more than half of it unauthorized, over at OPG to renovate the corporate offices.

Can the Premier tell us what the \$2 million was for and if he has told these corporations, "Follow the rules. If you don't follow the rules, there are going to be consequences, including people losing their jobs, and when it's these kinds of things, do the buildings that need to be done first, that most need it, not just some \$2-million project to renovate anything that comes to anybody's mind"? Have you done that?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): Yes, we have. In fact, I spoke at length with the chair of OPG. I'd remind the Leader of the Opposition that the auditor provided a number of recommendations. I have had that conversation with the chair of the board there and the chair at Hydro One, and they are taking appropriate action.

I would remind the member opposite of some of their multi-million-dollar projects. There was the \$4.6 million in untendered contracts to Michael Gourley, \$1.074 million in untendered contracts to Paul Rhodes, and the list goes on and on. There was the booth at the Air Canada Centre that some of your colleagues had the opportunity to be part of.

This government shone the light on the challenge. This government is addressing the challenge. This government will respond to all of the auditor's recommendations, because the auditor is right: We have to do it better. We will ensure that happens.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. This morning hydro consumers found out they paid for Tom Parkinson's \$96,000 BMW 645ci. That's the latest example of unchecked greed at Hydro One.

You promise things will be different, but what you're trying to hide is the fact that under the McGuinty government hydro salaries have exploded. Today in Ontario, under the McGuinty government, 15 hydro executives receive more financial compensation than the president of Hydro-Québec, a much bigger hydro utility.

My question is this: Can the Premier tell us why Ontario under the McGuinty government has so many high-priced hydro executives gorging at the public trough?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): The member opposite only has that information because we provided it to the public, and that is the first step in addressing what's going on at Hydro One and OPG. We acknowledge the challenges that are here today. We acknowledge that they have been there for many years. Unlike past governments, this government will respond

in a timely and responsible fashion to ensure that the ratepayers of Ontario get value for for money.

1520

We brought in the auditor. We're glad he went in. We will respond to all of the recommendations. And I would remind the member opposite—I know he has a history of opening and stripping collective agreements—that a lot of these salaries and benefits are based on collective agreements, and I would urge the member to think long and hard about that. You learned what happens when you don't do that in an appropriate fashion.

It's time to address the problems. We are doing it in a timely and responsible fashion. We accept the auditor's recommendations.

Mr. Hampton: I think people across Ontario want to know what union Tom Parkinson belongs to. I suspect it's the Liberal union.

We heard lots of bluster. Here is the reality. Dalton McGuinty has created a hydro hydra, a five-headed electricity bureaucracy that's devouring working families' money every day. Dalton McGuinty has a hydro bureaucracy for setting hydro rates, a bureaucracy for transmission, a bureaucracy that writes RFPs, a bureaucracy for some of the supply, a bureaucracy that regulates a market that doesn't exist and a bureaucracy for a conservation plan that doesn't exist. At the top of every one of these hydro bureaucracies, hydro fat cats rake in big bucks.

Premier, with so many people struggling to pay their hydro bills, how does the McGuinty government justify the explosion of bloated salaries across the hydro-electricity bureaucracies that you have created?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I suppose the member doesn't want to regulate an electricity sector. Is that what he's saying? I suppose the member doesn't want to have a planning authority. Is that what he's saying? I suppose the member doesn't want to deal with the real problems that are out there, and it's clear he doesn't want to acknowledge that the challenges we're faced with today have been faced at Ontario Hydro for many years.

For instance, his government spent \$73 million purchasing an electrical utility in Peru. Now, would I blame the member opposite personally for that? No. But let me tell you, what this government is doing differently from the government he was part of is that we're dealing with it. We put the auditor onto it, we're going to fix it, we're going to give ratepayers an assurance that they can expect better in the future and we're moving in that direction today.

Mr. Hampton: I guess the McGuinty government's giving Tom Parkinson \$1.6 million and then a further \$3 million is what the McGuinty government calls fixing things.

If we look east, to the province of Quebec, we see a unified hydroelectricity system, supply is plentiful, rates are reasonable and executive compensation is reasonable. There is only one president of Hydro-Québec and he gets paid less than \$500,000.

If we look to the west, a unified hydro system: Manitoba Hydro. Executive pay is reasonable: only one executive, who gets paid \$339,000.

In Ontario, Dalton McGuinty has created a multi-headed hydro monster where rates are skyrocketing, supply is spotty and fat-cat executives are at the top of everything, raking in the money.

Premier, people are losing their jobs because they can't pay the hydro bill. How do you justify paying so many hydro executives multi-million dollars in pay?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government is going to respond in an appropriate and timely fashion to all the recommendations of the auditor.

If the member wants to suggest that our system is as ideal as Quebec's or Manitoba's, it's not. We don't have the geography. He may not be aware of it, but they're net exporters and have lots of power to export. We have a much more complex situation.

It's interesting, though. Again, hydro has a long history of money being spent in ways that are a little bit questionable, and that's why we brought the auditor in. Your government spent \$1.3 million on a survey designed to understand the whole person. And do you know what they concluded, from that survey they spent \$1.3 million on, about electricity? It's important to be in love and have a love relationship that lasts. Those are the kinds of expenditures that have gone on historically. There are enormous challenges. The member doesn't have an answer for them. All he has is bluster. This government is responding to the auditor. This government is bringing order to this—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister. New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Premier. You say you're considering salary caps for your horde of hydro executives, but your word doesn't match your actions. Take the chair of the Ontario Energy Board. In 2002, before you became the government, he was paid \$122,000. In 2003, he gets a pay increase to \$191,000. In 2004, the McGuinty government raises his pay to \$498,000. In 2005, the McGuinty government raises this executive's pay to \$691,000. So that's a \$569,000 pay increase in three years.

Premier, how can you tell the people of Ontario that you are capping hydro executive salaries when it's the McGuinty government that's been raising them through the roof?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: First of all, the individual he has referenced is not an executive at either OPG or Hydro One. He's the head regulator of the Ontario Energy Board. It used to be Floyd Laughren. You remember him. We replaced him with somebody who had been the head of the Ontario Securities Commission and a number of other regulatory functions, and contracts were signed at the time of his hiring.

It is important that we respond to the auditor. It is important that we have these discussions. It's important that we handle them in an appropriate fashion. This gov-

ernment is committed to doing that. This government is committed to working with the entire sector. Most of all, this government is committed to ensuring that there is an adequate and reliable supply of electricity at affordable rates for ratepayers. We're delivering that and we're going to continue to deliver that.

Mr. Hampton: I just want to provide a few more examples. Thierry Vandal runs Hydro-Québec, a very complex transmission and generation hydro company with \$57 billion in assets. In 2005, he was paid \$470,000. In Ontario, under the McGuinty government, 15 hydro executives all get paid more than that. Tom Parkinson pocketed his \$1.6 million and \$3 million on the way out the door. Howard Wetston, at the Ontario Energy Board, gets his \$691,000. The Premier's former Bay Street bagman, who's now head of the Ontario Power Authority, gets \$637,000. The Independent Electricity System Operator's Dave Goulding, \$720,000, and OPG's Mr. Hankinson is in line to get \$1.6 million.

Premier, how can you justify these kinds of salaries when you tell people that you're capping the salaries?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The key issue is to ensure that we have an adequate, reliable supply of electricity. We're dealing with all of the challenges that have been discussed and, by the way, haven't been dealt with in the past. I could go through executive compensation at Ontario Hydro from 1990 to 1995. I could reference expense records. I could reference the \$34-billion debt that came about at that point. I could reference the \$10 million to \$12 million spent acquiring a Costa Rican rainforest. The point is that we have to move forward. We brought in freedom of information, we brought in the Auditor General, and we're going to bring in change to make those utilities more accountable to the public and ensure that we continue to have an adequate, reliable and affordable supply of electricity in this province, something, sir, that you never did.

Mr. Hampton: I think the people of Ontario understand what the truth is: The McGuinty government has been welcoming hydro executive fat cats with open arms. They also understand that the McGuinty government has been giving hydro consumers the back of the hand. Low-income people are struggling to pay the hydro bill. Literally thousands of workers have lost their jobs because their paper mill or their factory can't afford to pay the hydro bill. Meanwhile, the McGuinty government doles out millions of dollars to dozens of hydroelectricity executive fat cats whom you've appointed and put in their position. Now the McGuinty government expects people to believe this latest promise.

Premier, why should people believe your promise to cap hydro executive salaries, when you're the one who has been raising them through the roof and you have such a spotty record of keeping promises you've already made?

1530

Hon. Mr. Duncan: It's this government that brought the auditor in; it's this government that shone the light on OPG and Hydro One; it's this government that brought in

salary disclosure; and it's this government that has finally addressed the critical supply shortage of electricity we have had. There are many more challenges, including ensuring that OPG and Hydro One remain accountable to the people of Ontario. We're doing that. We are acting on the auditor's recommendations, and we will be moving forward with more change in the coming weeks and months to ensure that those ratepayers can have confidence in their public utilities. And we're going to continue, sir, to ensure that there's an adequate, reliable supply of electricity into the future.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Premier, several days have passed now and we're still not clear, after all the discussion, on the circumstances surrounding the resignation of Tom Parkinson from his position as CEO of Hydro One.

We all know that this came after revelation after revelation of mismanagement of the taxpayers' money. What the people who are e-mailing me—more e-mail than I've received on anything else since I've been here—don't understand is this: The board said they didn't want him to go and that they accepted his resignation reluctantly. They wonder, the people who are writing, why he then received a \$3-million payoff when he left of his own volition. The Minister of Energy says this was the cheapest option. I would suggest and would ask the Premier why he didn't consider the cheaper option, which is to give him one of those thank-you cards that they're using over at OPG now, hand him that and wish him well? Why didn't you pursue that as the cheapest option if, in fact, he left of his own volition and he quit? Why didn't you do it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: As I've indicated in the past, the advice the government had was that this was in fact the least expensive way of resolving the set of circumstances we found ourselves in. The advice was clear and unequivocal, and we accepted that advice, just as we accept and will be moving on all of the Auditor General's recommendations. That's why we brought in the provisions that we did, to allow the Auditor General to look at these things. In the longer course of events, given the historic situations that are still out there in terms of legal issues, we felt that this was the least expensive way of dealing with the situation and feel it was also the most responsible.

Mr. Tory: It's really quite simple. I think the taxpayers might have even accepted one of those leather coats plus the thank-you card if the fellow quit and was in need of something to thank him for his service. When you quit your job—especially when you quit under a cloud—you don't get a multi-million-dollar, multi-year package. Mr. Parkinson's choice apparently was to leave this job. The board said they were reluctant to see him go; they wanted to see him stay. You say the least expensive option, leaving aside entirely any matter of principle involved, is that he gets \$3 million for that. Will the

Premier please tell us under what circumstances, what possible circumstances, the \$3-million, multi-year payout could be justified if Mr. Parkinson quit on his own, under circumstances that are even more lavish than the retirement gifts we heard about at OPG that they now say are unacceptable? Why is this acceptable? Why is this the cheapest option? Why is it happening at all if he quit?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Again, the board and the government have acted in a way that we believe will minimize the cost to ratepayers associated with the situation. The member opposite knows full well that these are complex issues. In fact, he said on December 6, "It's always unfortunate when you have to pay out a big severance package, but those are a part of contractual provisions that are entered into that you can't ignore." You simply can't ignore that. I concur entirely with what he said. You have to take it in the context of all the circumstances surrounding the situation. That being said, I think the Leader of the Opposition and all members of this House are concerned about what was found. We are concerned. We intend to respond in a positive way to the auditor's report, and we intend to deal with OPG and Hydro One, and the broader public sector, in a way that not only previous governments did not want to deal with it but that previous governments didn't even want to speak about. We want to talk about it, we're going to deal with it, and we look forward to the ongoing discussions we're going to have around these issues.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Toronto businesses continue to get squeezed by your inequitable property tax regime and your government does nothing about it. Toronto's commercial property taxpayers are paying a rate that is 44% higher than the lowest urban rate in the GTA region and 30% higher than the GTA average. Toronto's business taxpayers do not receive a higher level of service than those outside the city, nor do Toronto schools benefit from businesses paying a higher rate of education taxes. Minister, this is causing serious problems for Toronto's small business owners. What are you going to do about it, and when are you going to do it?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): This is a great day for democracy, when my friend the NDP member from Parkdale-High Park starts to argue for lower taxes. I'm not sure it's the subway; I felt the room shake a little bit.

Let me tell her that we have been working particularly with small business to lower both the paper and regulatory burden and the tax burden. So we negotiated an historic agreement with the federal government to eliminate the entire process of filing and paying the provincial corporate tax, and soon I will have more to say to her on that.

On the subject of business education taxes, I simply say to her that it is one of the issues that we are putting

before a special committee task force of the province and municipalities right across Ontario.

Ms. DiNovo: The members of TABIA are here, and they have been waiting for 10 years. They met with you last June. Experts say this business tax regime is a significant contributor to the loss of business activity and employment in the city of Toronto to the 905 regions. Over the last 15 years, the 905 regions have gained 700,000 jobs while Toronto has lost 100,000. The business leaders here today want to know that their government has a plan. They don't want another commission or committee or promises. They want action. This is causing serious problems. People are losing their businesses. I ask you again, what are you going to do about it?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I just point out to my friend that Toronto business property owners benefited from some \$262 million a year due to cuts in business education taxes. I could be here for the rest of the afternoon listing what we have invested in city of Toronto over the past three years: hundreds of millions of dollars in transit, a brand new City of Toronto Act that recognizes the unique circumstances of the city of Toronto, but I simply say to her, and to those in the gallery, that the business education taxes of the city of Toronto are one of the things that we are going to be looking at as we examine initiatives moving forward toward a budget in 2007.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The McGuinty government is committed to ensuring that the youth of this province are given the opportunities they need to succeed in life. That's why, after so many years of cuts and neglect by previous governments, we're making historic investments: the \$6.2-billion Reaching Higher plan. We're giving people access to the education training they need to succeed, and in an economy where over 70% of all new jobs require post-secondary education, parents feel that for success, their sons or daughters need to go to university or college. Yet Ontario's rich post-secondary options also include an extensive college system with an enhanced skills training network. That's why I was pleased to hear you announce yesterday the Ontario youth apprenticeship program. It's been incredibly successful in attracting many of Ontario's young people. I saw 600 students participating in my own riding of Huron-Bruce last year.

But, Minister, my question is, for the benefit of those who aren't familiar with OYAP, can you tell us how OYAP prepares students for a career in the skilled trades and how it differs from a regular co-operative education program?

1540

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): It is indeed a very important and good question. OYAP is the Ontario youth apprenticeship program. It gives students the opportunity to not only earn high school credits but, at the same time, start

their apprenticeship while they're in high school. We know how important the skilled trades are. In fact, the member for Huron-Bruce often speaks about the need to ensure more skilled trades, not only for the traditional businesses in her riding but for the new and emerging businesses in the power and green power areas.

She mentioned that her riding has benefited from over 600 placements in the past year. This year we expect even more in Huron-Bruce, upwards of 650, and across the province, we expect 26,500 students will have that opportunity. That's more than twice as many as just three years ago. The program is working. The McGuinty government is proud to support it.

Mrs. Mitchell: It's very encouraging to know that every Ontarian has the opportunity to get the training they need to qualify for higher-paying jobs so that they can obtain a better quality of life while becoming valuable contributors to our economy.

This leads to my next question: With all that we are doing to prepare Ontarians for the workforce by way of job training, what do these students and apprentices have to look forward to after receiving the skills they need? What job prospects and opportunities are there for these hard-working and well-trained Ontarians?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: A question for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): I'm very happy to respond to the second question, related to the kinds of jobs we can expect to see in Ontario in the future and those that we're moving to now.

Like my colleague in training, colleges and universities, we have never had stronger links with colleges, universities and training centres and industry than we have today. A number of examples show us the kinds of jobs these people can be prepared to take: Sutherland, new opportunities in Windsor of 1,000 value-added jobs; Kellogg's new plant, its first plant in 20 years, being built now in Belleville with 100 new jobs just to start; Toyota Boshoku, as well, a new plant opening, with assistance, being close to that Toyota plant, that new greenfield site.

We are looking, through the auto sector alone, at 7,000 new jobs coming to Ontario. We're proud to be partnering not just with post-secondary institutions but, in fact, with industry to create real opportunity for Ontarians.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: Since the leaked Auditor General's report on the misuse of funds by children's aid societies, I've been asking the minister what has been done. I have written a letter to the minister, I've submitted an order paper question and I've asked several questions in this House. No action, no answers, no accountability from the minister in this House, just an accountability office slated for January. Yet on Monday, the minister felt compelled to write a

letter to the editor of the Lindsay Daily Post defending her rampant misspending at CASs while responding to my colleague Laurie Scott's monthly column.

Why is the minister spending her time responding to columns in local community papers rather than taking responsibility and responding to the people she is supposed to represent in this Legislature regarding her department's utter failure at CASs?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to once again speak about what we are doing here. I should also tell the member for Nepean-Carleton that she can expect to receive my response to her letter within a day or two. In fact, I have seen it and I expect to be signing it today. I improved and expanded upon the response, so I think she should be satisfied that she'll be getting a comprehensive response.

With regard to responding to the ill-advised piece from her colleague in the Lindsay paper, I think it is fair and reasonable for the people of Ontario to get the facts of this situation, not some political spin on the situation.

Ms. MacLeod: It's funny that she thinks it's fine to do a four-day turnaround time for community papers, but when legislators in this place have a question, she decides it's a two-week turnaround for them. What a lack of respect. Instead of defending rampant misspending at children's aid societies in local community papers, the minister should be worried that Lindsay has no Best Start spaces—absolutely zero.

But zero Best Start spaces in Lindsay aren't the only inaction by this minister. Let's look at her record of inaction in the last two weeks in this House. On November 30, the day the CBC story broke about CAS misspending, I asked her a question: What had been done? No response. On December 1, I sent her a letter asking what had been done. No response. On December 4, December 5 and December 6, John Tory and I questioned her on what had been done. No response. On December 7, the minister tried to sneak away and hide from the question, but it was asked, and guess what? No response.

What has been done, who has been fired and when will this minister respect Ontarians and take responsibility in this Legislature for her own—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Children and Youth Services can respond.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: In spite of the theatrics, I am happy to respond again, as I have over several days since the report's official release. We are creating a new accountability office that will monitor whether children's aid societies are meeting their legislative requirements for the care and protection of children and ensure that corrective action is taken as needed; assess and report on agency performance; and provide my ministry's staff with the training and tools they need to provide better oversight and create a new culture of continuous improvement in the CASs.

We are requiring children's aid societies to meet higher standards, as non-discretionary as those of the Ontario public service, for their own employees and pro-

grams in such areas as the procurement of goods and services; travel, meal and other expenses; hospitality; and the management of fleet vehicles. We're conducting an independent assessment of the fleet requirements of children's aid societies so that, where less expensive alternatives exist, CASs will be directed to relinquish vehicles as quickly and economically as possible, with savings redirected into service for children and youth. We are acting.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question is for the Premier. Premier, Bruce Power has applied to the National Energy Board to export 2,000 megawatts of nuclear-generated electricity to the United States. Instead of reserving limited capacity on high-voltage lines out of the Bruce area for clean, green wind energy, your government has capped wind energy development so that Bruce nuclear can export power to the United States. Will you stop Bruce Power from exporting even one megawatt of nuclear-generated power until you lift the cap off green power development in the Bruce area?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): No. The fact is that that power is exported at off-peak times when the wind power that you've been talking about—which, by the way, isn't up and running yet. So the answer is no. This has been going on for many years. The power is exported at off-peak times. It's baseload power. It's power that we would pay for otherwise—a tremendous cost to do that. It's not that that's causing the challenges with getting the power out of new opportunities in the Bruce; it's the lack of transmission. I know that that member opposite and his party will support us as we move forward to deal with the transmission issue. There is absolutely no correlation between the two issues. In fact, to not export the power would not be in the interest of ratepayers; it would hamper the development of new renewable power. So the answer to the member is no.

Mr. Tabuns: I find it a passing strange answer, but I'll continue on. Dalton McGuinty said that the lights would go out unless this province threw \$40 billion at dirty, unreliable and expensive nuclear power. Now, a few months later, Bruce nuclear is applying to export up to one third of its potential generation, some 2,000 megawatts, thanks to your sweetheart deal that sees Ontario ratepayers and taxpayers subsidize Bruce Power's fuel costs, nuclear waste disposal costs and decommissioning costs. Why are you letting Bruce Power export Ontario taxpayer- and ratepayer-subsidized nuclear power to the United States?

1550

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I will try to explain to the member that we are net importers of power in Ontario at the moment. Perhaps had your government not cancelled the Conawapa project, perhaps had you built at least one new energy installation in five years, we wouldn't be in this.

So if the member is suggesting that a province that imports power at peak times in summer and winter shouldn't be exporting at off-peak times, that we should cut ourselves off, that's a recipe for blackouts and economic disaster. I say to the member, I'd think that through long and carefully if I were you, because you've just advocated essentially shutting off major power supply that we need at peak time both in summer and winter. By the way, the power we sell at off-peak time helps maintain the operations and ensure not only that we can import power when we need to, but also helps to ensure that prices continue to remain as competitive as they are.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Could I ask for unanimous consent to extend question period to its full hour?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is there unanimous consent to extend question period past 4 o'clock for a full hour? Agreed. Next question.

HIGH-OCCUPANCY VEHICLE LANES

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I've got a question today for the Minister of Transportation. As we approach the one-year anniversary of high-occupancy vehicle lanes in Ontario, my constituents were asking if they've really made a difference. As you know, there are plenty of folks, myself included, who drive in and out of Toronto from Oakville through Mississauga almost every day. Could you tell the members of this Legislature, and for the benefit of my own constituents, how this initiative has really dealt with the challenges around traffic congestion in the greater Toronto area?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'd like to thank the member from Oakville for his question and also for his constant encouragement around this particular issue, as we move from one part of the QEW through to the end at the border.

We are the first government in history to put in an HOV lane. We've spent \$100 million—404, 403. It's making a difference. One of the reasons we can actually identify it is making a difference, because we put in right at the beginning, where people started to use it, and how they have used it incrementally—we now have information that indicates that at peak time we have double the capacity.

It's also changing congestion in terms of people who are now using buses. More people are using buses because, of course, buses can use the HOV lanes. So it's a good example of how we're tackling gridlock and congestion, which is a priority in our government. It's another example of using an innovative way to use or add on to our existing highways. I'd be more than pleased to add additional information.

Mr. Flynn: Thanks to the minister for her response. The introduction of HOV lanes on the 403 and 404, by most accounts, has certainly contributed to easing some of the pressure on our roads. However, there's no denying that gridlock continues to be a challenge that is

faced throughout the greater Toronto area. I certainly know it is one that commuters in my riding face and know all about. I often hear stories about the hours spent travelling to and from work every day.

Minister, what else is this government doing to ease the pressure on Ontarians, to ensure that we're all able to spend much less time in our cars and much more time with our families?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Again I thank the member for the question. We have something called the Compass system across our highways. Currently across the 401, every five minutes you can have an update as to what the status of that highway is in terms of an incident, a collision or construction. We have now extended that to the QEW. So you can either go online beforehand or you can find out through the Compass signs as you're travelling.

We've invested \$400 million—the first time in many years—to help our local municipal roads. We've put a huge amount of money, \$1.3 billion, into public transit. Again, it's the first time in many years that we've made this kind of commitment in public transit—\$830 million alone for GO Transit—because we recognize that we need to value the public transit system as much as we value other forms of transportation.

We have also invested in the Greater Toronto Transit Authority. This is the first time in the history of this province—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Please conclude your response.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: —that we have had an integrated approach to transportation planning that includes all forms of transportation, starting with GO Transit from Hamilton to Durham, enabling people to actually cross-border and to do it in a seamless fashion, using for the—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. New question.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Energy. You promised to shut down coal power, and you proceeded to break that promise. You promised that you would replace it by leading the way in wind power generation, and it appears you're breaking that one as well.

Minister, after luring developers with your promises and watching them make huge investments, you have now shut down wind power over a substantial portion of Ontario. In March, with your standard offer, everything was a go: "No transmission constraints—we need everything we can get." They go to work with Hydro One, they make deals with landowners, and now you're telling them that everything coming off Lake Huron, from Tobermory to Longwood, from Lambton to London—it's like Caledonia, it's a no-go zone. But it's a no-go zone for wind power.

Minister, why are you shutting down wind power in Bruce county, basically, off Lake Huron? Why are you—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): In Ontario, we've gone from last to first in Canada for wind power. We have brought on more than 450 megawatts up until now. There are another thousand scheduled to come online between now and the end of the year; they are under various stages of construction.

I welcome the member's question, because there is a transmission constraint in Bruce—no question. The projects that are already approved have line space; the Enbridge project is a good example of that. It will make standard offer more difficult in that particular part of the province, where there are a lot of opportunities. Based on your question, I know now that we can count on your support and the member from Grey county's support as we deal with the transmission constraint coming out of Bruce county, because you're right: It is one that needs to be dealt with. We're dealing with it, and we look forward to your support, because we want to get all of that wind, every last bit of it, out of Bruce county.

Mr. Yakabuski: Well, Minister, why could you not have dealt with them honestly in March when you told them that transmission is not an issue? "Come on, guys. Bring in your money and build. We'll take it." That's what you told them in March. As a matter of fact, 37 different connection impact assessments have been done, covering 397 megawatts. Some 61% of the wind power applications across this province are in this area, and you've told them no—the standard offer, the under 10 megawatts. You've told all of these people who have put their heart and soul, their hard-earned dollars and their investments into this province—you are saying no. Why couldn't you have been straight with them in March? Why are you now telling them, once they have invested millions? What kind of signal are you sending to everybody else in the world? Do you know what you're telling them? The only consistency of your energy policy is inconsistency. You continue to send mixed messages across this province and across this country. Minister, it is time to get a hold of yourselves and come out with a policy that people can depend on.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Let me say to the honourable member, first of all, that he is right that there are a large number of applications in Bruce. But they are all very small and don't represent a large percentage of the overall wind opportunity in Ontario. That's number one.

Number two, the transmission constraint coming out of Bruce county has been well known for some time. It has been the subject of the ISO's reports every six months. It has been well identified to investors and others alike.

Finally, in terms of the opportunities in Bruce county, there are a number of opportunities. Once we address the transmission constraint—and I note that the member for Grey county is vigorously supporting his colleague in dealing with that transmission constraint, as I'm sure the members in a number of other surrounding counties are as well. I'm delighted you're going to support us on that,

delighted you'll work with us on that, because I agree: We have to maximize the opportunities we have in Bruce county.

Carol Mitchell deserves enormous credit for all the work she has done in dealing with those particular—

The Acting Speaker: Next question.

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MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Mr. Minister, last week I asked you about calling an immediate provincial investigation into the allegations of wrongdoing, or alleged wrongdoing, in the city of Vaughan. But I want to further point out that 28 sessional days ago, I stood in this House and presented a petition from the citizens of the city of Vaughan requesting a ministerial inquiry. In those 28 days, you have not responded. So I am asking you, on both those behalves—the question I asked last week which was not answered and the petition that has not been answered—when are you going to put your office in charge of this and call an investigation, as the citizens have requested?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): It's passing strange that this member asked me about an hour and a half ago whether or not I was ready to meet with the mayor of Vaughan. As I told him then, I'm ready to meet with the mayor of Vaughan at any time. As far as I know, she has not asked to meet with me, but I'm ready to meet with her. I told him I'd meet with her tomorrow, and if he wanted to come along, he could come along. That was the whole conversation. So I have no idea why he's standing up in the House right now asking a question to which he already knows the answer. The point quite simply is, we're willing to meet with the mayor of Vaughan, I'm willing to discuss it with her, and if he wants to come along, he's more than welcome.

Mr. Prue: For the minister's edification, because obviously you don't know, your staff has already arranged a meeting for Thursday, not for tomorrow, just so that you know that. You pretend you're in the loop; you're not even in the loop.

The lead editorial in the Toronto Star says that the province should be involved in the investigation—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Would the members please come to order.

I return to the member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Prue: The lead editorial in yesterday's Toronto Star quite clearly said that there should be an investigation into the allegations that have been made in the city of Vaughan. Concerned citizens have petitioned you to get involved, but you refuse to do so.

I thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me and with the mayor, albeit on Thursday. I thank you for that. But I still want to know from you, and the citizens of Vaughan want to know from you, what are you in-

tending to do following that meeting? Are you prepared to put your office to the investigation, or are you content simply to have a 15-minute meeting and wash your hands again?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: He's right: I said tomorrow, and it's Thursday instead. He's right. Okay? The other thing, Speaker, I should tell you is that he said, "She only wants to meet with you for 15 minutes." I said, "Okay, I'll meet with her for 15 minutes."

The point simply is this: Under the new Bill 130, which we hope will be passed before the end of this session, a municipality will have the right to have an inquiry of the nature we're talking about within the meaning of the bill. I'm prepared to meet with the mayor, but I am not prepared to tell anyone what we're going to do until I actually have the conversation with her as to exactly what needs to be done and what kind of an investigation or undertaking is necessary. I'm prepared to meet with her tomorrow or Thursday; it will happen this week. I'm sure we can deal with the issue at that point in time.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): My question is for my colleague the Minister of the Environment. Minister, as you know, under the previous government the Ministry of the Environment was neglected. Its budget was slashed. The number of wonderful staff people at the MOE was reduced. Ontario finally has a green government that takes the protection of the environment for future generations of Ontarians very seriously.

I know that in addition to toughening the standards for air quality, this government is working with municipalities to further protect the sources of our drinking water. Justice O'Connor had several recommendations for the government following the Walkerton inquiry. Minister, can you please tell the constituents of my riding of Perth–Middlesex and all Ontarians what you have undertaken to do to improve our drinking water and what has been done to fulfill the recommendations of the Walkerton inquiry?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I want to thank the member for Perth–Middlesex, who is such a champion for the environment and clean water in this province.

On December 5 of last year, we introduced the Clean Water Act. That act has delivered on 12 more of Justice O'Connor's recommendations from the Walkerton inquiry. I am so proud to say that as of right now, we have implemented 83 of Justice O'Connor's recommendations. Out of the 121 in total, 83 are now done. The Clean Water Act goes further. It will ensure that we have some of the best protected water in North America. I am so proud to be part of a government that has moved us significantly to the top of the class in terms of water protection.

Mr. Wilkinson: It's encouraging to see that our government is actually making concrete steps forward to

protect our environment, the air we breathe and the water we drink.

I hear all the time from constituents in my riding that they're worried about the quality of our air getting worse, particularly in the summertime when hot and humid days make the smog in the air worse. I know that you've been working on tougher air emission standards that Ontario desperately needs in order to move forward on reducing harmful emissions. Minister, can you please update my constituents on your vital work in this area?

Hon. Ms. Broten: There is nothing more important that we can leave for our children than clean water and clean air. We have made the biggest move on the file in 25 years by updating the standards for 40 air pollutants, and we're currently working on 15 more in the Ministry of the Environment. We've set incredibly tough limits for the largest industrial sources of smog, we continue to work with industry to move them beyond compliance, and, along with Drive Clean and our goal to ensure that we have clean, green energy, we've signed an agreement between Quebec and Ontario. We continue to work on so many more initiatives to deliver clean air to future generations, to make sure that every day in the summer will be a clean air day, not a smog day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 30(b), it being past 4 of the clock, I am now required to call orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding standing order 77(b), I believe we have unanimous consent to call third reading of Bill 124 this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Agreed? Agreed.

I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: You'll probably want to dispense with this one after I read it.

I move that with respect to this afternoon's debate on the motion for third reading of Bill 124, an act dealing with access to regulated professions, up to 30 minutes be allotted to the government and the remaining time available, to 5:55 p.m., shall be divided equally among the official opposition and the third party, at which time the Speaker shall interrupt and put every question necessary to dispose of the motion for third reading of Bill 124; and that in the case of any division, the bill—sorry, the bell—shall be limited to 10 minutes.

You should know that this is not printed; this is written in the finest script I've ever seen in my life. That is why, when I hand this to you, Mr. Speaker, everybody will say, "Dispense."

The Acting Speaker: Let's give this a try. Mr. Bradley has moved that—

Interjections: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

FAIR ACCESS TO REGULATED PROFESSIONS ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR L'ACCÈS ÉQUITABLE AUX PROFESSIONS RÉGLEMENTÉES

Mr. Colle moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 124, An Act to provide for fair registration practices in Ontario's regulated professions / Projet de loi 124, Loi prévoyant des pratiques d'inscription équitables dans les professions réglementées de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the minister for his leadoff speech.

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Just to let you know in advance that I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, Khalil Ramal, the member from London-Fanshawe.

Bill 124, Mr. Speaker, as you may be well aware, is a bill that, for the first time in the province of Ontario, establishes provincial oversight over the 34 regulatory bodies that have been independent for generations. So it is quite an unprecedented bill, because as you know, whether it is the engineers or the doctors, the lawyers or the dietitians, they're all under independent authority to the regulatory powers invested in them.

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What this bill does is ensure that the processes for licensing and registration that these regulatory bodies have are fair, transparent and accountable, and applicant-friendly. That's the first thing Bill 124 does. It sets up a fair practices code, a fair practices process.

It also will establish, if the bill is passed, a very important resource centre, an access centre for the internationally trained. These are people who have been educated in countries throughout the world. They come to Ontario with great talent and skill, and they want to practise in their profession. In some cases, they're not quite sure where to turn, where to go. This bill would establish a resource centre, a hub that would be linked with all the community-based NGOs across the province so that people could come and get the proper counselling support and help to navigate these complex systems on how to be a licensed engineer, a licensed nurse or a licensed teacher in Ontario.

The third important part of Bill 124 is that it establishes the office of the fairness commissioner. The office of the fairness commissioner will work in conjunction with the access centre to ensure that if there are obstacles to people being accredited, there are no bureaucratic delays. People who ask for information on how to apply or why their application has never been responded to or,

if they failed, why they failed—the fairness commissioner would be their advocate, their champion.

So the bill has three component parts. It has the office of the fairness commissioner, which again acts as the central advocate for the foreign-trained professionals. Secondly, it has the access centre, which is a resource centre and also is a centre which promotes the creation of more mentorship and internship for the internationally trained in the province of Ontario. Thirdly, the transparent fair practices code would be established under this bill.

The bill is part of an overall government strategy, which is called breaking down barriers, and the breaking-down-barriers strategy of the McGuinty government is very, very much linked to Bill 124. Because with the new federal-provincial agreement signed a year ago November, the province of Ontario finally has the funding that we've never had in Ontario: \$920 million will now be invested in helping immigrants achieve success. That money has started to flow into Ontario, into expanding programs that are language-based and counselling-based. That money has finally come after over 15 years of lack of that federal funding. The good news is that that money will also help.

The second important thing that relates to Bill 124 and our breaking-down-barriers strategy is that the government of Ontario also now has full authority to sit down with the federal government in shaping policies as regards these programs that help newcomers. That's why Bill 124 is very timely, as we have signed the new federal-provincial immigration agreement. The new monies are now flowing. The Ontario government has launched the first-ever internship program for the internationally trained, where all government ministries now are beginning an internship program with people who have international experience. Also, there now is a \$5,000 international loan program for people who are foreign-trained.

Along with that, this bill and the breaking-down-barriers strategy of the government of Ontario also ensure that language training for foreign-trained individuals or anybody that is new to Ontario is now under a new robust curriculum. The \$50 million that the government of Ontario invests, usually with school boards—that program has now got a full, wholesome curriculum, with a new focus on occupation-specific English, business English and career English to ensure that these very talented newcomers, who in most cases seek more than moderate-level English or seek an elevated level of language training, can get jobs in accounting, biotech and engineering. Those are the non-credit ESL programs, which are now under my ministry. That's a very substantive \$50-million program that has now been revamped.

As we look at Bill 124, I think the best way to describe the bill to the public out there would be if I could read into the record some of the comments made by many of the experts and participants in the round tables I had across the province, whereby people gave

input in terms of how to better improve access for foreign-trained professionals and how to help them achieve their career goals. We also had public hearings here in Toronto and Hamilton. These are some of the people who wanted to be on the record in terms of how this bill would help break down these barriers for foreign-trained professionals.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, for too long in the province of Ontario we've had a brain waste. We've had too many talented people who, because of a lack of due process and a lack of opportunity, weren't able to contribute to this province. So this bill and our whole breaking-down-barriers strategy is part of turning that brain waste into a brain gain. That is critical, not only for the success of the newcomers, but it's really critical for communities across Ontario. These talented individuals can make great contributions, whether it be in the workplace, whether it be academically or whether it be in the community. So the goal of this legislation is to try to break down attitudes, to break down processes that are cumbersome and bureaucratic, and to give them help as they go through these sometimes convoluted processes of licensing and registration.

In fact, last night I was at Ryerson University, which is really a remarkable place. If you go there—I know some of you have been there. People will see the true new Ontario if they go to Ryerson, where people from every country in the world are studying and getting excellent instruction. It's a hub of student activity—adults, young learners—with great staff. The Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education is really where it's happening. If you want to see the future, you should visit Ryerson to see that school in operation. It is really an excellent source.

Last night I was at a graduation ceremony for internationally trained dietitians. The dietitians came from over 15 different countries. They were professional dietitians who had practised in their country of origin, and they came here to try and get employment as a dietitian. To be a dietitian, it's under the control of a regulatory college; there's a regulatory college even for dietitians. But these remarkable students last night—three or four of them spoke. They were so articulate and so passionate. They described the challenges they had, that by themselves they were waiting in some cases two or three years even to get in the door for a modest job, an entry-level job. Because of the program that our government has funded with Ryerson University, the Canadian association of dietitians and the College of Dietitians of Ontario, a process that used to take two, three or five years for a nationally trained dietitian has now been reduced to less than a year, where they get the acclimatization, the instruction in the nuances of working in a long-term-care facility, a hospital or a school in Ontario. The program basically blends the best of international dietary experience—maybe in Iran, Pakistan or South Africa—with the excellent instruction at Ryerson. Of those 20 dietitians who graduated last night, almost every one already had employment even before they'd completed their full course because they had gone

through that bridge training program that they have at Ryerson University.

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There was one very poignant case of a single mother with two children whose husband had died three months, unfortunately, after she got here. She was so jubilant that she's been able to raise her family, take this very difficult course, and now she's employed and has her accreditation as a dietitian. This is the type of success that can come as a result of working together with regulatory bodies, universities, community colleges and professional associations and investing in these talented individuals. This is how Bill 124 works in a real way. It provides resources and investment. It gets rid of the regulatory roadblocks. It also has the office of the fairness commissioner to ensure that the processes are properly dispensed with in a timely manner.

The bill is quite rigorous. I know that a lot of the people who represented the regulatory bodies thought that the bill would intrude upon their independence, but it does not do that. It recognizes the independence. On the other hand, it ensures that these bodies still function in the public interest when they are deciding who's licensed in Ontario, who's registered in Ontario. That is the key balance here. It respects the independence but ensures that the regulatory bodies are under government oversight, which they are not at this time. So the regulatory bodies now will be subject to mandatory annual reporting of their licensing admission practices. They will also be subject to audit by an independent third party to ensure that their practices are transparent, fair and without obstacles.

The fairness commissioner also has the power to order compliance, with pretty stiff measures at his or her disposal of up to \$100,000 in fines, if a regulatory body does not co-operate. I would think that most of the regulatory bodies see the fact that this legislation would complement what they are doing, but there is also a need to demonstrate that compliance is something that is necessary and the fairness commissioner has the power to ensure compliance.

Here are some of the comments I would just like to read into the record. This is from Dr. Jeffrey Reitz, who is one of the foremost experts in immigration at the University of Toronto: "I believe that Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, would make an enormously positive contribution to resolving one of the most significant problems confronting Canadian immigration today; namely, the underutilization of immigrants' skills.

"The bill addresses one of the most frequently mentioned aspects of the problem—fair access to professions—and does so in a way which is innovative and effective. I believe it will also prove to be a strategic move in the broader effort to deal with the problem across the labour force. It will show leadership in demonstrating that positive action is possible, and I believe the bill may be a catalyst to generating awareness across all groups of employers of the potential that exists within

our large immigrant population." That's Dr. Jeffrey Reitz, professor of immigration at the University of Toronto.

Also, some of the regulators were very supportive—not all regulators. Here's what Mr. David Hipgrave, from the Certified Management Accountants of Ontario, said: "We support this significant step by the government of Ontario and recognize that there are many other programs and services that assist the internationally trained in the province. We support the objectives of Bill 124 and applaud" the government "for their leadership...."

Mr. Kim Allen, of the Professional Engineers Ontario, who have been quite co-operative in this initiative, said, "Our position on it is that, again, if it improves the confidence of the people of Ontario that our practices are audited and demonstrated to be fair, transparent and all that, it's good for everybody concerned."

Mr. Patrick Hynes, of the Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services, said, "When our staff or clients encounter roadblocks in the credentialing process, Bill 124 will provide us a clear channel through which issues can be resolved. We believe the fairness commissioner will give strength to the advocacy role our agency plays."

Mr. Phil Schalm, program director, community services, the Chang school of continuing education, Ryerson University, said, "We consider Bill 124 to be an appropriate and timely intervention that is supportive of our own and our partner organizations' commitment to fairness and consistency. It formalizes this dimension of our province's commitment to helping immigrants maximize their contribution to our society and economy, and, put simply, it is an extension of the array of strategies introduced by the government of Ontario and its many partners in support of the professionals we so badly need."

Murray Coolican, of the Maytree Foundation, is also senior vice-president of Manufacturers Life—as you know, Mr. D'Alessandro of Manufacturers Life has taken a great leadership role. Also, Mr. Nixon at the Royal Bank has taken this critical leadership role, ensuring that employers become part of the solution.

Mr. Murray Coolican from the Maytree Foundation said, "So what difference will Bill 124 make? I think it will make a significant difference. First of all, the proposed access centre will be an identifiable source of reliable information on licensure and registration for internationally trained professionals. This centre can play an important role in helping to solve the information problem and supporting immigrant professionals in charting their own path and understanding their options. At TRIEC," the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, which helps link business with newcomers, "we know from our experiences with immigrant professionals and the institutions they interact with that there are very complex systems that need to be simplified into a clear path that can be navigated in a reasonable time." That's Murray Coolican from Manulife Financial.

Thomas Qu from CPAC, the Chinese Professionals Association of Canada: "Well, I know there are a lot of

things that can be done and a lot of considerations like people already raised during this consultation process. But I believe what is inside Bill 124 today is a practical and also a balanced approach."

Danny Mui from the Centre for Information and Community Services of Ontario: "CICS is in a strong position in supporting Bill 124. We support the principle of the bill to advance equitable access to regulated professions in Ontario. We are also delighted to see the introduction of the access centre for internationally trained individuals...."

These are samples of some of the supporters of the bill. Again, across this province there have been thousands of people who have come to public meetings saying we need to break down these barriers, we have to give resources to newcomers and we have to ensure that the regulatory bodies are answerable to the government.

I want to also read you a quote from Judge George Thomson, whom I've had long discussions with and who authored the very important Thomson report. What he says is really the essence of this bill: "When internal registration and appeal processes are effective, fair, and well understood, applicants are less likely to feel the need for an independent appeal or to feel aggrieved by a registration" process.

What we are doing in this bill is ensuring that applicants, and thankfully we have thousands who come to Ontario every year, have not only legislative support with this legislation, which ensures that the regulatory bodies now have to be accountable—they are not now; they're now self-governing without oversight—but it also establishes a centre that will have the ability to give counselling, support and information, link them to all the immigrant service hubs across the province and also work with other government bodies to ensure that foreign-trained individuals get proper advice, counselling and support.

As I said, it also sets up the office of the fairness commissioner. So the bill is fair and balanced. It recognizes the independence of the regulatory bodies, but tells the regulatory bodies they now have to be subject to annual reporting, they have to comply and they will work together with the fairness commissioner and the access centre to essentially make sure that these talented individuals get the support they need. There are these conflicting bureaucratic practices because these 34 bodies have a variation of different rules and regulations. This at least gives some sense of order, some sense of fairness right across the board, whether you're going to the school of architecture or engineering or the school for dietitians.

I pass it over to my colleague from London—Fanshawe, the great riding to the west.

1630

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London—Fanshawe): It is my great pleasure to speak today regarding Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act.

First, before I start, I would like to thank my friend and colleague Mike Colle, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, for his leadership on this bill.

I think in this day and age we should celebrate the debating of this bill, because this is a very important piece of legislation before us. We in this place and in many different places at many different times, and all the elected officials from both sides of the House, have been speaking about the same issue for years and years and years, and it's about time to debate it. It's about time to get the support to pass it. Many people who come to Ontario decided to come because they see Ontario as a very good opportunity to start their life, to use their education, utilize their skills and potential to help us in Ontario to continue building this great province.

When they come to this province they face a lot of barriers. They cannot utilize their education, their skills, they cannot put their potential at the service of the people of Ontario. Our minister, due to his leadership, is trying to break those barriers, to open it up and welcome everyone to come and use his or her education, his or her skills to help us continue to maintain what we have in Ontario; as a matter of fact, to keep prospering in this province.

Thousands of people choose Ontario to be their home. They come from different parts of the globe. They come with special education, with skills. And when they come, they face those barriers. They face some kind of psychological barrier and depression. So this bill will give them a chance to utilize their potential, their skills and their abilities.

We realize we have a lot of regulatory bodies, almost 34 in Ontario, to control and regulate the professions of this province. We listened to them. We invited them to come to us and speak and we sought their advice, because it's very important to us when we put our trust in the regulatory bodies, to take their advice and dialogue with them in order to break those barriers. Despite what everybody says, most of the regulatory bodies in Ontario want to work with us. They want to help us. They want to help foreign-trained professionals to enter the professions, to be part of the great province of Ontario, to be part of the professions. That's why we listened to them. We listened carefully, and we also invited many stakeholders across Ontario to advise us. Many settlement agency programs across Ontario have been working very hard for years and years with the newcomers to help them to fit and integrate.

I will give you an example. When we went to open the committee meetings here in this place, we listened to many stakeholders, like the intercultural labour social services that came to us and told us about the importance of the passage of this bill. We went to Hamilton. We listened to many stakeholders in Hamilton. We listened to engineers. We listened to doctors, pharmacists, nurses. Different stakeholders came and advised us and told us about the importance of the bill and what has to be done in order to break the barriers, in order to create a way, a mechanism, to help all the people to fit and integrate.

Therefore, when we listened for almost four days in the committee, we listened to many, many different stakeholders, many different settlement agency programs,

and they told us about what they need. They told us about their concern. When we came to clause-by-clause, we listened to them. The clause-by-clause was a great reflection of their concern. We adjusted what they asked us to be adjusted without jeopardizing the system, without blocking our goal, which we are going to achieve, hopefully by the passage of this bill, to open up the professions for many people who want to be inside Ontario, working, able to give back to this great province.

Also, before that, our minister asked George Thomson to commission a report, and based on that report, we acted. We established a framework, the mechanism in order to go forward to break those barriers. Many people came to us and told us what they needed, and we based our judgment, our path and our direction on the Thomson report. That report took a lot of time and effort. Judge Thomson went many different directions, went to different stakeholders, went to regulatory bodies, studied the whole thing in detail and came up with a great report to advise us about the important steps we should take in order to break down those barriers, which we followed.

Even then, we continued the dialogue with the stakeholders, we continued to talk to regulatory bodies, we continued to open up to all the people to advise us and we came up with a great mechanism. I think it's a great step toward opening up for many people.

I had the chance and the privilege to visit many different communities across the province of Ontario with the Honourable Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Mike Colle. We talked to them in London, in Toronto, in Mississauga, Scarborough. He went to Ottawa, he went to Windsor, he went to Thunder Bay. Many different communities opened up and listened to him and they welcomed that step because they believe strongly that passing the bill will give them a great chance to find a life and utilize their abilities and skills in the province of Ontario.

That's why we got a lot of petitions from many different communities. A lot of groups came and endorsed this bill and supported the bill in order to give them a chance to live and to be able to practise the professions they love and the professions they went to school for for years and years and years. They put a lot of effort, a lot of time into their professions. They love to do them; they love to exercise them in Ontario. They love to utilize them in Ontario. They love to benefit Ontario. That's why we introduced this very important bill which is before us. I hope all the members of the House will support it because of the great steps.

The opposition members were with us on the committee and they listened to many different stakeholders, they listened to many newcomers, they listened to many people who are suffering from the blockage, from the barriers which they have faced for many years. I hope they support this bill quickly, because it is important. The people have been waiting for a long time. They cannot wait any more. They have a family to support. They have a life in front of them. They have skills and abilities that they want to use in the province of Ontario.

We understand the importance of the fees, which sometimes create barriers. That's why our government, in the bill, introduced a \$5,000 loan to give many newcomers, many foreign-trained professionals the ability to use this fund to pay the fees and give them the chance to participate in the exams.

Also, by creating a fairness commissioner, I think it shows the commitment of our government to passing the bill, the commitment of our government to seeing a strong bill to help many people fit and integrate. That's why this bill asks for the creation of a fairness commissioner to oversee the conduct of regulatory bodies. It's not because we think regulatory bodies in Ontario don't respect and have a mechanism to allow people to fit and integrate, but as a matter of fact, this is a great indication of our commitment.

That's why I would now invite all my colleagues in this great place to support us and, by supporting this bill, to support a new generation that chooses Canada, chooses Ontario to be their home and final destination, to give them the chance to utilize their skills, to utilize their abilities in order to help us as members of this community to continue building the great province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me the chance to participate in this debate. I will listen to the opposition, and hopefully they will support us in order to pass this great bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? I apologize; there are no questions and comments. Further debate?

1640

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to rise in the context of debate of a bill that certainly is extremely important not only to many of my constituents in the riding of Oak Ridges but across the GTA and indeed the province of Ontario.

At the outset I want to say that we, as the PC caucus, will be supporting this bill. I don't believe that there is any member of the Legislature who would take issue with the need to reduce barriers to foreign-trained professionals, those who have skills to be able to access jobs and careers in this province. We all, I believe, in this House are all too familiar with individuals who have come to this country, who have expectations of being able to participate in a very active and positive way in not only providing for their families and advancing their careers, but making a positive contribution as well to the community, only to get here to find that rather than open arms, there are significant barriers that keep them from becoming engaged in their profession.

To that end, we all welcomed the announcement of a bill that would have as its objective ensuring access to professions in this province. It did not take long, however, for us to realize that some of the most practical measures that the government should be taking to help skilled workers and foreign-trained professionals to access those jobs are in fact missing from this bill. Over the course of debate, first of all on second reading and

then again as we moved into the committee process, we in the official opposition, on behalf of many who approached us either personally or through e-mails and phone calls, and indeed those who came forward and took the time to appear before the committee, who advocated not only on behalf of themselves but on behalf of many who are in similar circumstances, pointed out very specifically to the government some steps that should be taken that would not only give voice to those individuals who have challenges entering the workforce but would result, then, in action and results. In the course of the hearings, the clause-by-clause hearings specifically—that's the period in time in the legislative process when specific amendments can be tabled, when we present the government with those specific recommendations—we were so disappointed that the government did not accept one single amendment that was proposed, whether it be by the official opposition, the PC caucus, or the third party.

I want to just take the time to review some of those amendments. As I said, overall we're going to support the bill because the intent is right and we believe that the government has some things right about this bill. But we also believe that the government has missed an opportunity, first of all, to send a signal that they really do believe in this legislative process, that they don't have all of the answers, that the legislation as prepared by the ministry was not perfect and that there would be some signal that members of this Legislature—and the public, by the way—have a role to play in developing the laws of our land. Second, there were some very specific recommendations, but because the government chose to be political and partisan in consideration of this bill, this bill is not as strong and as effective as it could be.

One of the amendments that we proposed was a crucial amendment that would have seen the process of establishing a system for having foreign work experience evaluated. The reason that we put that particular amendment forward is that it would have ensured that in the same way that there are equivalencies for certification, there would be an equivalency model developed that would enable individuals who have foreign work experience, by a very formalized process, to have that foreign work experience translated into an equivalent Canadian work experience.

The reason we put that forward is because we heard over and over again from individuals that the greatest single barrier to getting a job in this province, next only to having their credentials recognized, and that's a fairly technical process, but important—but it's one thing to have your credentials recognized, and it is yet then even a larger barrier to have someone open the door to get a job. The first question that is often asked is, "What is your Canadian work experience?" Well, what can you say? You've just arrived. You're an immigrant. You've been told by the immigration system that because you're a professional, our point system that qualifies people to actually be able to immigrate to this country gives people high marks in that rating system because they happen to

be a professional or have a professional designation. Then they come to this country and they find out, first of all, that that professional designation is worthless. So we go through that process of qualifying. This bill is intended to address a lot of those challenges that immigrants have, but what it fails to do is to address that very practical next step, and that is the issue of Canadian work experience.

We had a presentation by a company called SkillRoute. Mr. Shan Palanisamy and Jim Buchan made a presentation to the standing committee. This is a company that, for a number of years now, has been working in Ontario with a number of the colleges in developing precisely such a model that I believe would fit very well into the intent of what Bill 124 is attempting to do. I would call on the government to look very carefully at this model. Often we tend to want to reinvent the wheel and we discount people who come forward. In this particular case, I really believe it's imperative that the government pursue the work that SkillRoute has undertaken and hopefully find a way to work in partnership with them to accelerate that process in the best interests of many foreign-trained professionals.

I was disappointed in the course of the deliberations. The parliamentary assistant, Mr. Ramal, during the clause-by-clause and in response, for example, to this proposal that I made on behalf of the PC caucus to incorporate this amendment for the Canadian equivalency, said, "You don't know what you're talking about; it already exists." It's unfortunate that we have someone in a responsible position as parliamentary assistant for this ministry that has carriage of this bill to make such an incorrect statement. I mean, everybody knows that that equivalency rating does not exist for Canadian work experience. Mr. Ramal's statement concerns me because I believe it indicates that the government is not in focus, is not in tune with the very practical aspects that are so important for individuals to be able to find that job, that career position that they need. It's not enough for them to somehow be recognized by the college, not enough for their credentials to be recognized. It's very important for that to take place, but then also that there's a smooth transition and a helpful transition into a job and into a career position.

1650

What I want to do to emphasize this point is to point out to Mr. Ramal that Ratna Omidvar's statement—he is the executive director of the Maytree Foundation. He made this statement in an address to the Ontario Liberal Party annual policy development conference on February 26 of this year: "Canadian work experience is the most difficult barrier for immigrants."

Mr. Ramal directed the members of his government on the committee to vote down the amendment that I put forward that would have addressed this very issue. Why, I don't know. But as I say, I want to underscore that I believe it was a big mistake. I'm hopeful that, having voted down that amendment, at least we can recover by having, in a practical way, this issue addressed somehow.

I want to point out that we would not have been able to do the work that we did in advancing the cause of this bill without the many people who came forward to express their personal views and their personal circumstances, and I want to thank some people who took the time to meet with me in my constituency office, took the time to send me their e-mails to share their personal circumstances.

I especially would like to thank Dr. Nabil Moharib of Richmond Hill. This individual has been trying now for more than six years to get accredited as a doctor in Ontario. He shared with me many of his frustrations. I have to tell you that when you listen to these stories of individuals who have practised for many years in their country of origin—and we have a doctor shortage in this province; we have many underserved areas. To continue to see the barriers that are in place that keep people not only from practising their profession but, in many ways, frustrating them—it must be incredibly debilitating to be in a position in life when you know what you can do, you know the contribution you can make to your community and you're being held back from doing so simply because of the artificial barriers that are in place.

I also want to thank Dr. Faris Salim Hawa and Aleem Hirjee, a pharmacist from Richmond Hill, who shared their experiences and made some very positive recommendations. Mr. Martin Mol of Aurora was very helpful in making some recommendations, as well as Namratha Mary Kuruvilla from Markham. All of these individuals have personal stories that simply underscore the need for us to do something very practical to ensure that the individuals we've invited to this province and this country are given an equal opportunity and a level playing field to be able to engage in their profession and become productive in our community.

When I speak about the need for practical steps to be taken, I want to just remind the government—and I would ask Mr. Ramal and I would ask Minister Colle to familiarize themselves with this paper, which is entitled *A Time for Action. Ontario's Skilled Immigrants: Unmet Expectations, Unfulfilled Responsibilities*. This is a paper that was researched extensively by the leader of the official opposition, John Tory, over a period of many months' consultations with groups throughout Ontario. I really believe that it is a work that would benefit the government. I would ask that it not be viewed in a partisan sense but that it would be seen as very helpful to the work that the government is attempting to do.

In these recommendations put forward by John Tory, there are some 14 key points that are being recommended here to make it very practical for foreign-trained professionals and skilled immigrants to be able to transition into the workforce. The first of those recommendations is to establish a new online assessment, education and testing initiative that would help potential newcomers address the accreditation process in their country of origin before they arrive in Ontario.

This again is something that we proposed in the course of the committee hearings, and it is something that is so very practical. It takes two to three years, and sometimes as much as six years, from the time that someone applies to become an immigrant until they finally get approved. Mr. Tory's proposal is, why not start the process of getting an equivalency rating for a professional designation while the individual is still in the country of origin rather than waiting to get here and then finding that there is no job and finding that you have to start what in many cases is then another two, three, four or five-year process?

With regard to not just the equivalency rating for a professional designation, we're suggesting that we begin some of the training that can take place, some of the upgrading that can take place. Much can be done through distance learning. So we're encouraging the government to look seriously at that recommendation and also that the Canadian work experience equivalency rating can take place while someone is still in their country of origin.

The second recommendation made under Mr. Tory's proposal, *A Time For Action*, is to expand the role of our colleges and universities to bring training overseas to newcomers' countries of origin. Many of our colleges are already doing that, and they have programs in various countries around the world. We're saying, let's engage our universities and our colleges with a specific objective of ensuring that potential immigrants would have a place to go, a place to learn and to begin their training, so that when they get here, when they land on Ontario soil, they're ready to move forward and become engaged.

The third recommendation is to work with the federal government and stakeholders to review the existing immigration system. As I said earlier, I believe the current immigration system is one that sets up false expectations. It really leaves people with a sense that, because they have certain designations or a certain profession, when they get here there will be a job. That's simply not the case, and we have to do something to address the federal immigration system. We have to work co-operatively with the federal government to ensure that this matter is addressed.

The fourth recommendation of *A Time for Action* is to empower the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration by tasking all immigrant-related programs and funding through this one ministry. This will promote efficiency and focus. I believe it is extremely important that the various responsibilities—whether it be training programs, whether it be coordination, whether it be the responsibility for setting and reviewing standards for evaluating credentials of foreign-trained labour—should in fact be empowered within one ministry so that one minister has not only the authority but also the knowledge and the scope to deal with this very important issue.

1700

The fifth recommendation is to help more newcomers to settle in communities beyond the GTA where their contributions are needed. The fact is that 60% of all immigrants to Canada end up coming to Ontario, and of

that 60%, 82% settle in the GTA. Is it any wonder, then, that quite often there's competition in the same job market? Would it not make sense that we take very seriously the responsibility of encouraging—not forcing, but encouraging—individuals to look at other job markets, ensure they have the information available to them as to what is available in other job markets and ensure that there are incentives for individuals to consider areas outside the GTA where they may well want to settle?

A very good friend of mine, who is a medical doctor, was encouraged to take on his first responsibilities as a medical doctor in northern Ontario. His wife didn't want to go there; she was from Toronto. They moved there, and they're still living there 20 years later. The reason is that once they got there they found it was a wonderful community with great opportunities and a great quality of life.

I think we have a responsibility to immigrants to this country to ensure they become familiar with what is available in the rest of Ontario, what the job opportunities are and what the economic opportunities are. I believe that by doing so, we will not only help individuals but also help to improve overall economic advantages throughout the province.

The sixth recommendation of A Time for Action is more financial support. The recommendation is: "Broaden the OSAP system to make credentialing processes and bridging/upgrading courses eligible for student loans." Right now, that's not the case. We would ask the government to give very serious consideration to this. Immigrants come to this country. Very few of them have the financial resources to go through the credentialing process and the fees that are there. So we would strongly recommend that the OSAP system be extended to new Canadians who are going through this credentialing program.

The seventh recommendation is, "Use TVOntario to its full potential." We propose that we work with Ontario's colleges, universities and other relevant educators. TVO should assist in the design of those programs. They should assist in the publishing and broadcasting of language training and integration programs across the spectrum of Internet, television and video mediums. If we go back to the purpose of TVO, that really is what TVO should be all about. It's the opportunity to put some public dollars behind an important education medium.

The eighth recommendation is to enhance ESL training to provide better supports for industry-specific ESL training and other pre-employment training. Much of the ESL training that goes on now is not industry-specific. We strongly recommend that we target ESL training. The kind of language training that individuals get, if it's more industry-specific, will be much more conducive to enabling an individual to get a job when they're in a job application and they've had the background, the nuances, the language skills that relate to their particular trade or profession.

The ninth recommendation in A Time for Action, as proposed by Mr. Tory and the Ontario PC caucus, is,

"Make bridging and mentoring programs a higher priority and urgently modify and expand them for small and medium-sized businesses." I know that John Tory is someone who, while he was in the private sector, took a great deal of initiative in encouraging large corporations to take on immigrants, newcomers to this province, and create opportunities within companies so there would be an opportunity to get that Canadian experience—very successful. What we would call on the government to do is expand the kind of program initiated by Mr. Tory into small and medium-sized businesses. As a result of that, we believe we will have much more success and help people integrate into jobs.

The 10th recommendation is to ensure that funding intended for settlement and immigration purposes actually goes there. How much public money is announced with good intentions, but then the question becomes, where does it go? What we want to do is ensure that there's an appropriate focus and auditing mechanism in place. Legislation should be enacted to ensure that the monies that are intended for settlement programs are actually used for those purposes and not diverted into general revenues or other programs.

The 11th recommendation is to establish and expand the various doctor assistant programs. Foreign-trained doctors whose qualifications have been verified can shadow a doctor and/or under the supervision of a mentor doctor provide basic services, and especially in underserved areas. This is something that would be so welcome. I have foreign-trained doctors coming into my office virtually every week, saying, "Look, I understand that I have to get some up upgrading. I understand that I need some additional training. But give me an opportunity to at least work in an environment where I can assimilate some of the nuances of the medical practice." John Tory is recommending that we give specific attention to these various doctor assistant programs, put the necessary resources behind them and ensure that these individuals will receive the kind of support and training that they so much deserve.

The 12th recommendation is career mentoring. The recommendation involves a province-wide system of career mentoring for newcomers in their areas offered through groups such as Skills for Change. Such groups can use these funds to broaden or begin mentoring services. Nothing is more important than having individuals spend time, be shoulder to shoulder, be in the environment with individuals they know, whom they can relate to; ideally, those who speak their mother tongue, those who understand the culture and can be there to point out what the particular nuances are of this culture and help them transition and integrate into the Canadian and the Ontario workplace.

The 13th recommendation is setting standards for services to newcomers. We need to improve the speed and efficiency of the services that we offer to newcomers. The notion of service benchmarks, guidelines and courses of redress needs to be expanded across many more areas. To that end, we believe that Bill 124 will

play a very important role in ensuring that those benchmarks are achieved. That's why we're supporting this bill. We believe that it's going to be a very important aspect of ensuring that newcomers are much more readily integrated into the job market.

Finally, the 14th recommendation of John Tory's A Time for Action is to hold an annual summit of stakeholders. We believe that the situation faced today by skilled immigrants in Ontario is an urgent challenge. In light of this, the Ontario government should hold an annual summit of stakeholders interested in, working with and affected by skilled immigrant recruitment, credentialing and integration issues, mandated to measure progress and provide accountability to the sector. No one has more of a vested interest in ensuring that skilled immigrants, skilled workers, foreign-trained professionals, become integrated into the Ontario workplace and into the Ontario economy. We have such a lack of skilled workers in this province, and yet all too often foreign-trained skilled workers are having a difficult time accessing those jobs.

I have reviewed in some detail the 14 key points of A Time for Action. I want to extend an invitation to anyone who may be listening to this debate, following the debate, to come forward. We look forward to having many more of the recommendations. Nobody knows better than the individuals who are on the front lines, who are experiencing the challenges of integrating into the workforce, as to what the solutions are.

1710

We will be supporting this bill. I commend the government for coming forward with this initiative. We are disappointed that the government did not accept one of our recommendations which would have in fact made the bill a much better bill, would have ensured much more practical integration. However, we made the effort.

With that I will rest my case. We look forward to continuing to work with the broader community to ensure that in the province of Ontario not only is there a message that immigrants are welcome here, but to ensure that when people arrive here there are open doors to them, not only in terms of credentialing, not only in terms of recognizing their professions, which is primarily what this bill recognizes, but that there are also practical ways that individuals can become integrated into our community, can find the jobs and can in fact become productive members of our society.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): It's not with any great or particular pleasure that I rise to address this bill today, because I see this bill as, unfortunately, a very, very large lost opportunity.

When we look around us, when we look at the situation that faces this province, when we look at the situation that faces new Canadians, we see a problem that is both a crisis and a scandal, a situation that puts people's lives into a deep-freeze that has a huge impact on our economy.

I want to address first the crisis that's seen in new Canadian communities. New Canadians are arriving in

this country by the tens of thousands to build our society, to build our community, to build Ontario. They're coming from prestigious universities around the world. They're coming from positions where they have exercised great responsibility, where they've had to have a background of demanding, professional training, where they've had substantial experience. They come to Canada, they come to Ontario to make a contribution to our economy. They come to make a contribution to our society. They come to provide a good life for themselves and their children. And yet, they are being left in the waiting room. They're pumping gas, they're putting groceries on shelves, they are writing parking tickets, they're driving cabs.

These are people who have come to Canada with tremendous hope, a feeling that their lives are to start over. They have confidence that their credentials and their experience are going to put them to work, are going to stand them in good stead. For too many of them, the first shock is finding that their credentials, their background, their years of experience are largely of no consequence: "So what? You don't have Canadian experience. You don't have Canadian credentials. We're not impressed. Frankly, not only are we not impressed, but we don't think we're going to recognize those credentials."

So people scramble. They spend money on courses, they try extensive job searches, they apply for recognition of their credentials. For many of them, they come here with their life savings—everything. They bring all that they have in an effort, in a hope to come and establish a life. When they come here and have those first shocks, they realize that they're spending their money—they're spending their money on courses, on rent and on social supports—while they desperately go around looking for jobs, looking for recognition. Eventually, many of these people run out of their life savings and they're faced with a very stark choice: Do they stay and take a survival job—and a "survival job" is what it's called. If they take that survival job, if they're from a profession—and most of them are like this—that is fast-changing, one that requires people to be completely current with what's happening in their field, they know that their chances of returning to that career are largely gone. Do they move on to another province? Do they move on to another country? Do they go home? They are faced with very stark choices. That is why, for many people in Canada, in new Canadian communities, there is a crisis related to their credentials and related to their employment. For those who stay and take a survival job, there's an engendering of bitterness, despair, anger and desperation.

I talk to people in and outside my riding who see corrosion of their families, who see lack of support for their children, who see development of social problems that shouldn't be developing, because the people who come here have the intelligence, the experience and the skill to contribute in a very high-level way to our society.

So I want to talk a bit about some statistics to back up this point that we are seeing a crisis in the new Canadian community. When we were in Hamilton, one of the

organizations that presented to us was called Human Endeavour. They noted that six in 10 immigrants are forced to change their careers when they come to Canada—the majority. That's a lot of lost skill, training and experience—the majority. According to HRDC, Canada loses one in six of its newcomers within the first year because they are unable to integrate. That's a very large volume of people coming in and moving on. I've had some people refer to Ontario as the waiting room for Alberta, as the waiting room for the United States. We give them a base in North America, they do what they can here and then they move on. It's a huge waste of potential opportunity for us and for them.

Food bank usage in the greater Toronto area: In 1995, 12% of the immigrant households using food banks were headed by immigrants with at least some university education. By 2002, that became 59% of immigrant households using food banks. Almost 60% of the immigrant households using food banks in the GTA were people who had higher education and were not being allowed, were not able to access work in their careers in the areas where they had been trained.

According to Stats Canada, in 2001 the earnings for recent immigrants in the year 2000 had dropped on average by \$6,200 per year compared to new immigrants in the early 1980s. That's a very substantial drop in income at the same time that average income in Canada has been rising. So we're bringing in more people with a higher level of training, a higher level of skill, and yet they're seeing their incomes drop. This is a substantial problem. It is a problem that continues to deteriorate.

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Now, I spoke about the crisis. There is a scandal: that this waste of resources, this casting of people's lives into limbo, is completely unnecessary. It does not have to happen. It can be corrected. During the 2003 election, Dalton McGuinty spoke to this issue. He promised to take action within a year of being elected. He would make sure that regulatory bodies would change their practices so that people's credentials would be certified. It wasn't corrected within a year. But within about a year Judge Thomson was appointed to write a report on the institution of independent tribunals for decisions by registering bodies, by colleges, by boards. In fact, in 2004, there was a government question placed by Kathleen Wynne to then Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities Mary Anne Chambers:

"Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. It's certainly not a secret to anyone in this House that providing access to professions and trades for internationally trained professionals is vital to our workforce and our economy. Since we formed government, I know we've done substantial work on working with Ontario's regulatory bodies and by providing several bridge training programs to provide our internationally trained with Canadian work experience.

"But about 70% of the residents of the neighbourhoods of Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park in my riding are recent immigrants to Canada. Many of

them received approval for their applications to immigrate to Canada specifically because of the points they got for their professional credentials, but when they got here, they discovered that their credentials aren't the ones Canada's regulatory bodies accept. More than that, they're frustrated by the fact that the process to appeal an accreditation decision by a regulatory body varies widely among the professions and trades, with no common standard." In 2004, a recognition of the need for a common standard, for independent tribunals. "Minister, could you talk about what steps our government is taking to address this issue?

"Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): We are closely committed to improving the access of internationally trained individuals to professions and trades in Ontario. With regard to the process for accreditation and licensure, many refer to that process as being confusing and arbitrary." I agree with the minister.

"I do want to say that I've been working with the regulators over the past several months, and many of them are making really good progress. But it is a fact that the processes vary greatly from one regulatory body to another. Very recently I appointed former Ontario Justice George Thomson to review all these processes and the appeals opportunities that go along with these processes. I have asked him to recommend to me an appropriate process for independent appeals."

I think it was pretty clear at the time what was being asked. It was pretty clear at the time the direction the minister was going in. It was pretty clear at the time what instructions were being given to Judge Thomson. So he set about developing his report. He talked to an awful lot of folks. He talked to people in the colleges; he talked to ministries; he talked to community organizations; he talked to non-health regulators. There are four pages of organizations that he talked to. His consultations were extensive and his conclusions and recommendations were very clear. In November 2005, he submitted his report to then Minister Mike Colle—things have changed—and I want to just read to you how Judge Thomson saw his mandate, what he saw his purpose was:

"Dear Minister Colle:

"I am pleased to enclose my report on appeals from the registration and licensure decisions of Ontario regulatory bodies that oversee professions and determine whether applicants shall be permitted to practise a profession in Ontario or to use specific professional designations....

"In her referral of September 2004, Minister Chambers asked me to examine current appeal processes for registration or licensure decisions made by professional regulatory bodies of Ontario's self-regulated professions and to make recommendations for independent appeal mechanisms.... I have set out what, in my view, should be the characteristics of a strong, independent appeal body. I have also made recommendations with respect to the internal procedures of regulatory bodies, consistent with my view that improving these procedures will minimize the number of appeals, while also making it

possible for those appeals that do proceed to be well heard and resolved.”

I think he was pretty clear on his mandate. His mandate was to set up a system of independent appeal tribunals, a recommendation on how that would be carried out. He wanted to make sure that the system’s underlying registration processes were clear and ones that people generally could rely on so that independent appeals were not everyday, but relatively rare occurrences so that we would have, in some ways, an independent review and in some way a discipline or a governance imposed on self-regulating bodies so that details would be heard, practices would be changed and people would feel that they weren’t being locked out. However, he went on and he brought forward his recommendations. Of the 22 recommendations, six—more than a quarter—refer to the need to set up these independent tribunals. He talked about available decisions, what decisions people could appeal, what the grounds would be for appeal, the notice of appeal, the remedies on appeal, procedural elements of independent appeal, adjudicators, structure and location of appeal body.

He talked about what actually had to happen to set up independent appeals to deal with the problem identified by the minister and in response to the mandate he had been given. So in June of this year, Bill 124 came forward and the heart of the mandate that had been given to Judge Thomson, the core of his report around which other pieces were built, was missing. Bill 124 did not include independent appeal tribunals; it did not deal with a central process or piece of what was needed to put things right in the whole process of registration in this province.

I know that recognition of credentials is only part of the solution. It’s a vital part but it is only a part.

I want to talk about what we should be doing, because I would say that virtually everyone in this Legislature would know what has to be done to address the problem. A lot of organizations have been writing about this for years. We know how to improve the lives of internationally educated professionals. In broad terms, we need to do a few things, and one is to tell people who are considering moving to Ontario what the real situation is, to tell them what the real potential is for them to gain employment in the areas where they’ve been trained, where they have experience, where they have a commitment.

I’ve talked to people from China, from Pakistan, from Bangladesh and from eastern Europe who came to this country not knowing how high the wall was that they would have to climb to actually use their skills. A number of people said to me, “If I had known, I would not have come here.” They had a commitment in their lives to a particular profession, a particular area where they could use their skills, and they did not realize that for the majority who come here, the ability to use those skills and that training will not be available to them. The federal immigration department didn’t tell them and, frankly, we in Ontario haven’t told them. I’ll talk a bit more about that later.

I would say that the first thing we have to do is tell people the truth, tell people what the real situation is in Ontario before they gamble their life savings, before they take that very big leap of moving to this country.

Interjection: It’s a great country.

Mr. Tabuns: It is a great country, it’s a fabulous country, and if we actually acted to welcome people and give them the opportunity to use their skills, it would be an even greater country than it is.

Outside of that question, first of all, of telling people the truth is the question of helping people get inside the door for that first job. It’s a Catch-22. It’s a chicken-and-egg situation. People need to be able to say that they have Canadian work experience to get jobs, but to get jobs, they have to have Canadian work experience. We have to break that logjam. We need programs that are substantive, that are much bigger than the 70 internship positions for internationally educated professionals that have been offered with the Ontario government. We need investment so that thousands of people, not a few score, get the support to get in the door, get the training, get the technical and social support so they can actually get that experience in Canada, develop the familiarity with our culture, and we in turn develop familiarity with their culture.

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It’s costing them, but it’s also costing our economy. The Conference Board of Canada calculates that the impact on Canada’s gross domestic product by under-employing people is in the range of \$3 billion to \$5 billion per year. Someone who’s earning \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year driving a cab, who should be earning \$60,000 to \$100,000 a year working as an engineer, pharmacist or doctor, is a huge loss of income to this country as a whole, and this province, Ontario, is losing tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue. If these people were employed at the level they need to be employed at, at the level they deserve to be employed at, we would be in a position to build an economy in Ontario that fully utilizes the intelligence, skills and commitment of all the people who live here, and right now we’re not doing that.

Outside of the elements I just talked about, within the bill itself we need an independent tribunal. Judge Thomson had a few other things to say about independent tribunals.

“Finding 1: importance of independent appeals

“With regulatory bodies making decisions as important as whether individuals are permitted to practise a profession or hold themselves out as members of a particular profession, access to an independent appeal is vital.” I think that’s pretty straightforward, pretty clear. “Well-developed, transparent, independent appeal mechanisms enhance public confidence in the overall registration process. Independent appeals constitute an accountability mechanism that fosters due diligence and promotes high-quality internal procedures and a concerted effort to avoid or remedy errors so that appeals will not be launched.”

That’s pretty clear language as to why we need one, as to why he was appointed in the first place, as to why this

bill needs within it a provision for independent appeals tribunals. That's something that many agreed with: the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the Pakistani Professionals Forum, the Canadian Tamil Congress, the Chinese Canadian National Council, the Chinese Canadian National Council, Toronto chapter, the certified management accountants of Bangladesh, Canadian chapter, the Ontario Federation of Labour, the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, the Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, OCASI, and many others.

The independent tribunal is a core piece of what's needed to make the regulatory system work in Ontario. It's not in this bill. Again, not enough; we know that in the medical profession, doctors in particular, we have independent tribunals, but we still have a significant problem. Independent tribunals do not solve all our problems but they're a significant and necessary component of the bill.

Our party, the NDP, recommended that the access centre that's being set up be given the task, the mandate, to assess not only the educational credentials of those coming from overseas but to assess the credentials or the standards set by regulatory bodies and other jurisdictions, so that not only our own regulatory bodies, our colleges and our boards would know precisely the value and quality of those standards in other jurisdictions but applicants, those who want to become our pharmacists, engineers and accountants, would be able to say when they apply, "The government of Ontario has assessed the standards to which I have been accountable for many years, and they have concluded that they are equivalent to the standards in this province. You should be certifying me." Level the playing field so that those credentials are assessed and those applicants have the support they need. That was not adopted by the government in the course of clause-by-clause debate. It was a lost opportunity. It's an opportunity that will be a while in being addressed, a while before it gets addressed again.

Another matter that came up was the need to have a concerted effort to eliminate bias from our activities and have that concerted effort very consciously built into the whole way we assess individuals and that we assess regulatory bodies that assess individuals. What did the subcommittee with a Liberal majority do with those amendments? First of all, it should be noted that the bill they introduced didn't include an independent appeal tribunal, although the minister called for it in 2004, although Judge Thomson explicitly had been told to bring back recommendations on how to do it, even though Judge Thomson's report not only showed how to do it but also talked about how independent tribunals would make for a better system.

What they did include in their bill was the institution of a fairness commissioner and an access centre. Let's look at those for a moment. The fairness commissioner will be an appointee of cabinet. We in the NDP think that this should be a far more significant position, that the fairness commissioner should report to the Legislature,

like the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, like the Auditor General, like the Ombudsman. Their power and their authority have to be substantial to deal with the scope of the problem before us. That was not adopted by the government.

Something that has to be noted is that the fairness commissioner does not have a duty or power to intervene in individual cases where there's unfairness. Now, I've talked to a lot of people in the activist community, internationally educated professionals, who think that that is the job of the fairness commissioner, that they will step in when there's unfairness in an individual case and take corrective action. I just want to say to those who have followed this debate, that's not there. In fact, it's explicitly prohibited in the bill. The fairness commissioner cannot intervene in individual cases. You've got to know that.

The commissioner will review registration practices to see if they're fair, transparent and impartial, and order audits where he has concerns. This may be useful—it remains to be seen—but I don't think it compares to the establishment of an independent tribunal that people can appeal to. We'll see. We know that it won't compare; we'll see if it's useful.

The other aspect of this bill is the access centre. What I find strange is that this is being codified in law when, frankly, you could simply, as the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, just set it up with an allocation of budget funds. You—Citizenship and Immigration—have already got a toll-free number. You have a website. I assume there are people behind it who are answering the e-mail inquiries, the phone inquiries. You have the nucleus of it, in any event. If you go to settlement.org you can see that there are people working on providing information. If you go to another website, ontarioimmigration.ca, it has many pages of information and a section on how people can become employed in their professions in this province. I want to say that I actually took the opportunity yesterday to go through that website, ontarioimmigration.ca. Indeed, I found it a revelation, because all along I felt that the federal government had been derelict in not telling people what the situation was in Canada, and that's still true. But, frankly, it's not just that; it's a question of the provincial government being as derelict as Mr. Harper and Mr. Martin before him.

If you look at the Ontario immigration website, there's a page called "Before You Arrive." Part of this is quite accurate and true: "Ontario is a land of opportunity. It is a prosperous, democratic society built by the hard work of generations of immigrants." I can't argue with that; it's true. "We hope that you will decide to make Ontario your new home."

"Our people are our greatest asset, and we welcome the talent and energy that newcomers bring to our province. In return, we offer opportunities and a quality of life that are second to none."

There's no mention that the majority of people who come here who are trained as professionals can't work in their career; there's no mention of the growing number of

professionals, according to the Daily Bread Food Bank, who are accessing the food bank even though they have college level and higher, university level and higher.

On the page, under "Work in Your Profession," they say:

"It is important to realize that Ontario's requirements for getting a licence may not be the same as other Canadian provinces. For example, different courses or more experience may be necessary in some fields.

"In most regulated occupations, immigrants trained internationally have to go through several steps to meet Ontario's licensing requirements....

"And you will probably be required to take examinations to demonstrate your competence to practise your profession."

The last paragraph is the best:

"If you find there are gaps in your education or experience, you may consider taking courses, improving your language skills or getting more work experience."

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Where do they get that work experience? Where do they find out that in fact it's Canadian work experience they need and that isn't readily available to someone who doesn't have Canadian work experience? No information on the real situation in Ontario. In this account, there's every reason to continue to berate the federal government for its lack of honesty with people considering coming to this country, but we in Ontario have to look at what we do and what we say to people, because we too are not telling them what's really going on.

Going back to the bill itself, there was some pressure from the community and some pressure from our party, and I was pleased to see that the government actually listed the professions that will be covered by the act in the act itself.

There was an amendment we put forward requiring regulatory bodies to let people know what their appeal rights were, in situations where appeals were available, when a decision was given to them about their registration. That was a useful thing. But a number of other amendments that were important and effective were spurned. They didn't set up the independent tribunal, as I've said, but they did an amazing thing. They moved an amendment to give the fairness commissioner power to include an analysis of the possibility of establishing a tribunal to hear appeals of registration decisions. Wow. That's quite something. As if the last three years didn't exist, as if Judge Thomson had never been told to go out and look at this issue, as if Judge Thomson had never talked to anyone, as if he had never actually written a report.

He has already done that work, and yet that work has been set aside. But we do have legislation telling the fairness commissioner that he or she may come back and report on this. I would think you don't need a law to tell the fairness commissioner that he can report on an independent tribunal. But I would say that it does work well if you have an election coming up and you want to say in your literature, "Independent appeal tribunal still on the agenda. We're working on it." You know all the

clichés: "Rome not built in a day," "We're moving toward it," "We're working toward it," "Yes, it's developing." It's quite extraordinary to me that that amendment was put in with no consideration of what had happened over the past few years.

One of the other amendments that we asked they put in was support by trained advocates for people who go forward to appeal. If you're born here, you find our process for approvals complex. But for people coming from very different cultures, it can be a complete labyrinth, and it made entire sense that people were provided with support. The cards are stacked against them. There were no votes forthcoming to support the idea of providing internationally educated professionals with that kind of backup, that kind of advocacy when they do appeal.

Another area that was raised by the community is that of discrimination and bias. In 2004, an organization called the Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades published a paper in the public interest about this whole question of recognition of credentials. One of the issues they touched on was discrimination and bias. They looked at an article done by some prominent lawyers in this city—Mary Cornish, Elizabeth McIntyre and Amanda Pask—in 2001 in the Canadian Labour and Employment Law Journal. They spoke about discrimination, and PROMPT quoted them. PROMPT says, "They contend that the barriers faced by internationally educated professionals have been seen to constitute 'systemic discrimination' on the basis of at least their place of origin and arguably, also, depending on the facts, on the basis of their ethnic origin, ancestry, race, colour and/or gender."

PROMPT, in its paper, interviewed a number of people familiar with the issues in this field. Two of their key informants "expressed a concern that there is much discrimination toward certain countries, while degrees and experience from white, British or European countries tend to be accepted much more easily."

These concerns were echoed in the presentations of a number of organizations, who asked explicitly that the government require training for those who assess credentials: anti-discrimination training and cultural competency training. They asked that those who look at the examinations that are put together have that training and that those examinations, those assessments, be informed and shaped by anti-discrimination training. They asked that the auditors be trained in anti-discrimination and have a human rights background—that they have those skills. That did not come forward. Not one piece of that was adopted.

There are fundamental problems with this bill that cannot be fixed later through regulation. The bill doesn't include the independent tribunals. That can't be added by cabinet later.

I know that people need action. Even when that action is limited, even when that action falls far short of what would really make a substantial difference in people's lives, they need to see some forward movement. That's unfortunate, because this bill doesn't fulfill those needs.

It speaks to not half a loaf; perhaps a crust, a small part of what actually has to be addressed. It doesn't meet the mandate that was originally put forward by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. It's a bill that may have some positive impact, but will not actually move the framework, move the situation in a way that will deal either with the crisis or the scandal. It's a small bill; it has great limitations.

In the course of the hearings, I heard many people who supported the bill saying, "We need to get it through right away. There's no time for amendments." I found it curious that there was a concern about the speed, because there was no sense whatsoever that this bill was going to be slowed up by anyone. I found it odd that there was concern that there should be no amendments, when it was very clear that amendments had to happen. I know over the next nine months there will be a lot of announcements, but I have no doubt that a year from now, two years from now, these issues will still be debated, these issues will still be of great concern in the community and these issues will still have an impact on our society and our economy. That is a very difficult reality to contem-

plate. It's a reality that no one wants to continue but which will be here with us.

The government has the power in its hands to correct this problem. It's unfortunate that it did not use the power at its disposal.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Colle has moved third reading of Bill 124. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Orders of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until later on this evening at 6:45 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1749.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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No. 135B

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**Second Session, 38th Parliament**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**Deuxième session, 38^e législature**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)****Journal
des débats
(Hansard)****Tuesday 12 December 2006****Mardi 12 décembre 2006**Speaker
Honourable Michael A. BrownClerk
Claude L. DesRosiersPrésident
L'honorable Michael A. BrownGreffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Tuesday 12 December 2006

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mardi 12 décembre 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES
CONSUMER PROTECTION AND SERVICE
MODERNIZATION ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 DU MINISTÈRE
DES SERVICES GOUVERNEMENTAUX
SUR LA MODERNISATION DES SERVICES
ET DE LA PROTECTION
DU CONSOMMATEUR

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 11, 2006, on the motion for third reading of Bill 152, An Act to modernize various Acts administered by or affecting the Ministry of Government Services / Projet de loi 152,

Loi visant à moderniser diverses lois qui relèvent du ministère des Services gouvernementaux ou qui le touchent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Further debate?

Mr. Phillips has moved third reading of Bill 152. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Orders of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1847.

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Tuesday 12 December 2006

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No. 136

N° 136

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 13 December 2006

Mercredi 13 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
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Président
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 13 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 13 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): It is my contention that of all the hospitals in Ontario, there is not one that has more enthusiastic local public support than the Groves Memorial Community Hospital in the township of centre Wellington.

The Groves hospital's reputation for excellence is well deserved, a reputation that is shared by the hospitals of North Wellington Health Care and the other hospitals which serve my constituents. As this year comes to an end, we express our thanks.

In the spring of 2007, the Groves hospital will open its new community chemotherapy clinic in partnership with the Grand River Hospital in Kitchener. This new cancer care clinic will mean that cancer patients will receive their chemotherapy closer to home. This new clinic represents hope for families as patients beat cancer and get better.

To complement this new cancer care service, there is a need for a new CT scanner to ensure that the level of service at Groves is consistent with the standard of care and availability of CT at other hospitals serving a similar population with a similar clinical program. It will mean reduced wait times and improved local access to this essential diagnostic procedure and it will mean better medical care all around.

Recently, the Groves Memorial Community Hospital board submitted an updated master plan to the Ministry of Health which includes a bold vision for a brand new hospital. As the MPP for Waterloo–Wellington, I will continue to actively support whatever hospital redevelopment plan the board and our community put forward for the ministry's consideration. I'm pleased that the Minister of Health is in the House to hear what I have to say today and I urge the ministry to move swiftly to respond to our health care needs.

FEDERAL LIBERAL LEADERSHIP CONVENTION

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): The energetic exercise of our democratic rights is vital to a healthy, self-rejuvenating society. Rule by a free, educated and

engaged majority is sometimes awkward, lurching from time to time in new directions. Nonetheless, these corrections are usually what keep us on course at least in the long run, and all partisanship aside, I believe democracy usually gets it right.

I had the happy privilege recently of participating in the Montreal federal Liberal leadership convention, and upon reflection, it seems to me that exercises in democracy like this are, for any party, important moments in the life of a free and open society. Yes, it's combative, expensive, even draining, but it works.

Stéphane Dion is a man of principle whom I was honoured to support right through the convention. He brings a sense of balance and a vision to the future of his party, which is what Canada needs. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate both the convention organizers for staging such a compelling exercise in grassroots leadership and the new Liberal Party of Canada leader for triumphing through it all. Stéphane Dion, on behalf of my colleagues, we wish you well.

MID-PENINSULA HIGHWAY

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): Thirty-eight long months since Dalton McGuinty's election and the mid-peninsula corridor is still stuck in reverse. We're still waiting for the start date of the environmental assessment for the mid-peninsula corridor.

You will recall that the EA was ready to go under the previous government. When this government came in, they tossed out all the old studies, wasted hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars and said they'd start from square one.

Sadly, it took a long time before the mid-pen policy even got to Minister Takhar's desk over at the Chalmers Group. He said he would finally get moving on the terms of reference in the fall of 2004, but it wasn't until October 28, 2005, that those terms of reference were submitted. Now that they have finally been approved, in June 2006, we still have no firm date for the EA consultations to begin. It was suggested they would finally begin in the fall of 2006—mind you, technically there are still eight days left in the fall—but nobody would think that December 2006 is an adequate start date for this project. Commuters and business still stuck on the 403, the Queen Elizabeth Way and the Lincoln Alexander want to see an investment in highway infrastructure; they want to see the project moving soon. At this Dalton McGuinty snail's pace, we're all going to be like the

Jetsons, flying over where the highway should have been, unless they get moving. Let's put the highway in gear.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On January 31, 2007, PenSafe, owners of Haun Drop Forge, is pulling the plug on its Welland operation. Haun Drop Forge, part of the Welland-Niagara area forge industry—70 years old, highly skilled workers, an incredible history of quality product—is having its production transferred to Asia. Perhaps when the Premier is visiting India with his entourage of MPPs on his January junket, he can say hello to the Asian workers who will be manufacturing the quality products that used to be made by workers at Haun Drop Forge in Welland.

These are hard-working folks, raising their families, raising their grandkids, building homes and building communities. But you've got a forge operation—a high electricity consumer—that simply can't afford the electricity costs anymore, and you have a small business that tells me this government doesn't understand small business. This government thinks small business is 200 workers in a non-union factory.

Haun Drop Forge, with 23 active workers, was out of the loop when it came to funding and support for research and innovative development of new products. This type of operation increasingly is becoming the source of employment here in the province of Ontario, and they're the ones that are under direct attack by this government's electricity policies. No Parkinson salary and severance package for these people, just a pink slip.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I rise today to point out that the Office for Victims of Crime worked this past year with community representatives in six regional committees across this province to review and suggest projects that are innovative and effective that could fill some gaps. There was nearly \$6 million spent this year alone, and nearly a million of that is going to community-based agencies in central western Ontario to support new programs and services for victims of crime. I just want to highlight a couple of them. One of them, St. Joseph's Immigrant Women's Centre in Hamilton, received \$42,660 at the end of last week to create 12 workshops to offer immigrant women a safe environment to discuss issues of domestic or sexual violence and explore choices and services available to them in the community of Hamilton. The project will also provide for a series of four staff training and development sessions on violence against women.

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In Burlington, Halton Women's Place received \$150,000 from this fund to implement a domestic violence public education outreach strategy for Halton region. This is targeting marginalized communities. Elements of the strategy include recruitment of community ambassadors, updating the organization's website, and

translation of print materials into multiple languages and formats.

My congratulations to those agencies, to their staff and to the volunteers who work there for coming up with these excellent programs and for getting this funding.

ORPHANED DEER

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): Let me share a sad Christmas story from my constituency. It is about a family, a deer and the grinch who are attempting to steal Christmas; in Nepean-Carleton, we call them over-zealous MNR officials.

You see, I represent a caring and a compassionate community, like my other colleagues do, with suburbs and farms. We are a city, but with a rural flair.

On one of these farms lived a deer named Bam Bam. Bam Bam has been cared for since she was an abandoned fawn by the Straby family. Bam Bam became part of their family. She would come when she was called. The Strabys, for their part, made sure Bam Bam was well taken care of with food, shelter, and, most importantly, love. That is, of course, until representatives of the MNR heard about it. Like the grinch who stole Christmas, no one quite knows why the MNR, backed up by three police cars, confiscated Bam Bam and moved her away from the family.

Sadly, the Strabys have to pay to visit her at a faraway zoo. Worse still, they may still face charges for their act of compassion.

So I wrote to the minister and I asked that he intervene. I believe, as my constituents do, that this family should be reunited. The Minister of Natural Resources has the authority to bring Bam Bam home for Christmas. He can right the wrong of his officials. After all, even the grinch who stole Christmas brought back the toys.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): This Friday, I will be in my riding to announce an exciting new program that will teach high-school-aged youth the principles of CPR. The Ontario segment of this program was made possible through the joint efforts of our government, the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Advanced Coronary Treatment Foundation. The program has aimed to establish a CPR program in high schools across Ontario in order to provide nearly 450,000 youth with the skill and awareness to help save lives at home and in their communities. By understanding the "chain of survival," these youth will be adept at understanding the warning signs and providing the person in duress the best chance for survival.

To date, 60% of the high schools in Ontario have this significant program in place. The success of this program has been made possible through \$650,000 over three years from the McGuinty government through the Ministry of Education. This is in addition to the \$300,000 in funding over three years from the Trillium Foundation

and also the tireless work of the Advanced Coronary Treatment Foundation in both fundraising and implementation of this program.

This program is an excellent way of preparing Ontario's youth for emergencies in their homes and in their communities. I'm very proud to be part of a government that helps fund programs like this so that we can make real progress in building strong communities across Ontario.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): It is with great pleasure that I rise in this House today to declare the McGuinty government's commitment to our children and youth.

Last year I became a father, and I have to say that after my twin boys' birth on December 11, 2005, Sebastien and Alexander changed my life and gave me a wonderful perspective on the work we do here. The boys celebrated their first birthday on Monday of this week with family, friends, cake and much wrapping paper.

Our kids are our most precious resource, and we need to ensure that we take care of their development and needs in the early years so that they arrive at school ready to learn. We need every Ontarian at his best, and we need him to start at birth.

A funny story also happened this past week. Alexander likes to squirm around all the time when I'm trying to change his diaper. Sebastien, the other twin, was very observant and saw that daddy was having a hard time, so he came over and helped to pin Alexander down so daddy could change his diaper, which was very funny; it was hilarious, actually, at the time. You could just see the learning and how observant kids are.

I look forward to the time that they will attend public school, with reduced class sizes and improved schools. Today our newborns, thanks to our government, receive vaccines for pneumonia, chickenpox and meningitis funded by the government. Our kids are counting on us to clean up our environment: water, land and air.

HOLOCAUST

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): Sadly, I rise today to speak about the Holocaust. It's in the news today: The notion of the Holocaust is under attack, as we sit here today. It is described as a myth in some quarters. This is false, absurd and beyond comprehension. Jews, blacks, gypsies, homosexuals and other minorities were the target of concentration camps, the target of the Holocaust. Mothers, daughters, sons and fathers were lost forever, lost to hatred.

On behalf of the lost family members, on behalf of all survivors, on behalf of all Canadians who fought against this regime in the Second World War, we in Ontario will remember this. I stand here to say to those today who are continuing to spread hate, to spread intolerance, that your lies will not be tolerated. We will remember. We will all

remember. The idea that the Holocaust is a myth is truly sinful.

VISITORS

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I rise today to introduce and to welcome two wonderful people, Peter and Helen Soderquest, hard-working individuals from Hamilton. They are here today celebrating Peter's retirement. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

NOTICE OF REASONED AMENDMENT

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 69(b), the House leader of the third party, the member for Niagara Centre, has notified the Clerk of his intention to file notice of a reasoned amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996, and the Executive Council Act. The order for second reading of Bill 173 may therefore not be called today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Pursuant to standing order 61(c), the supplementary estimates (2006-07) of the Office of the Assembly before the standing committee on estimates are reported back to the House, as they were not selected by the committee for consideration, and are deemed to be received and concurred in.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I beg leave to present the first report 2006 of the standing committee on regulations and private bills and move the adoption of its recommendations.

In tabling this report, I'd like to note that it's the committee's 31st report since it began reviewing regulations in 1978. This report covers all of 2005 and the period right up to May 20, 2006.

As Chair of the committee, I want to thank the staff and all of the people who helped with the committee, all of the members of the committee who worked very hard for their ongoing contributions to the standing committee on regulations and private bills. May all of the members have a very happy holiday season.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member has made a brief statement. The member for Hamilton East.

Ms. Horwath: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Ms. Horwath: I beg leave to present a report for the standing committee on regulations and private bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill Pr29, An Act respecting Sheena's Place.

Your committee begs to report the following bills as amended:

Bill Pr31, An Act respecting the Perimeter Institute; and Bill Pr32, An Act respecting the Centre for International Governance Innovation.

The Speaker: Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I beg leave to present a report on Ontario's student assistance program from the standing committee on public accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Sterling: As members of the Legislature know, the public accounts committee, an all-party committee, deals with recommendations from the auditor. This particular recommendation regarding the student assistance program emanates out of the auditor's report of 2003, which then was reviewed again in 2005. So the committee was dealing with the 2005 report to follow up what the recommendations of the 2003 report pointed out.

A great concern of the committee surrounded the default rate. In other words, how many students were not paying back their loans? Up to about 2003, the default rate fell. In other words, more students were paying their loans. Subsequent to that time span, the default rate has begun to rise, so more students are not paying their loans. This was of concern to the committee.

There are many, many recommendations in the report, including actually seven or eight recommendations asking the ministry to report back to the committee as to why this rate is rising at this time and why the 10% target, which was set back in 2003, was not attained.

When this process was begun in 2003, the default rate was around 20% to 22%. It fell to about 13% but has risen again to about 16% or 17%. It was the feeling of the committee that a new target should be set and it should be attained. The 10% target probably could be reached if everyone got together.

I commend this report to all members and to the ministry. I believe it's a challenge that can be met by that ministry.

I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I beg leave to present a report on agencies, boards and commissions, Hydro One, from the standing committee on government agencies and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mrs. Munro: This is the second of three agencies on which the committee has held hearings. I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation of the efforts of the presenters, the legislative staff and the committee members themselves to make this process a valuable contribution to the public record.

I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

STRENGTHENING BUSINESS THROUGH A SIMPLER TAX SYSTEM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 VISANT À RENFORCER LES ENTREPRISES GRÂCE À UN RÉGIME FISCAL PLUS SIMPLE

Mr. Sorbara moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 174, An Act to enact the Taxation Act, 2006 and make complementary and other amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 174, Loi édictant la Loi de 2006 sur les impôts et apportant des modifications complémentaires et autres à diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

The minister may wish to make a brief statement.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I'll reserve my comments until ministers' statements.

PENSION BENEFITS AMENDMENT ACT (UNLOCKING PENSION FUNDS), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RÉGIMES DE RETRAITE (DÉBLOCAGE DE FONDS DES CAISSES DE RETRAITE)

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 175, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act to allow transfers of locked-in pension funds to registered

retirement income funds / Projet de loi 175, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite pour permettre le transfert de caisses de retraite immobilisées à des fonds enregistrés de revenu de retraite.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I do. Currently, pension funds that are in locked-in accounts can't be withdrawn except in very specific circumstances. In fact, many people can't get access to them in the current regime until they turn 90. This is unacceptable. I have been working with CARP, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, or persons over the age of 50, on trying to get this ball rolling, and hope that we can some day soon unlock locked-in funds.

VISITORS

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I know the House would enthusiastically welcome three residents from the great city of Ottawa here: Alycia White-Brown, Joel Monfils and Adam DeCaire, from Ottawa West-Nepean and Ottawa South. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: I'm sure that members would be pleased to join me in welcoming Doug Galt, the former member for Northumberland, who's with us today, and his lovely wife, Cathy, who is the candidate of record for the riding of Northumberland. Welcome.

MOTIONS

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 158

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding discharging a bill from committee and ordering it for third reading.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that the December 7, 2006, order of the House referring Bill 158, An Act to revise legislation relating to the public service of Ontario by repealing the Public Service Act, enacting the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006 and the Ontario Provincial Police Collective Bargaining Act, 2006 and making complementary amendments to various Acts and by amending various Acts in respect of the successor rights of certain public servants, to the standing committee on general government be discharged and it be ordered for third reading.

The Speaker: Shall the motion carry? Carried.

1400

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CORPORATE TAX IMPÔT DES SOCIÉTÉS

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): On October 6 of this year, I joined my federal counterpart, federal minister Jim Flaherty, to announce the first step in our plan to harmonize corporate tax collection. Today, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share with you and the members of this House the next step in the plan.

J'ai déposé aujourd'hui un projet de loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les principaux éléments annoncés dans le protocole d'accord que le ministre Flaherty et moi-même avons exposé en octobre dernier.

If passed, this bill will accomplish three important goals. First, it will deliver clear benefits to businesses of all sizes. They will spend less time on paperwork and they'll save up to \$100 million annually from one set of tax rules, one tax auditor and one tax form. Second, there will be a modest reduction in the amount corporations in Ontario will actually pay in taxes, by some \$90 million a year. Third, it will reduce red tape by cutting the combined personal and corporate tax legislation and regulations currently in existence by more than half.

Ce projet de loi montre également jusqu'où peuvent mener les efforts de collaboration intergouvernementaux et à quel point une telle coopération sert nos intérêts communs.

To accomplish these goals, the bill combines two existing statutes, the Corporations Tax Act and the Income Tax Act, into one single new piece of legislation. In doing so, this legislation proposes to simplify and streamline tax administration in this province.

Let me assure you, as is abundantly clear to anyone who has ever filed a corporate tax return or tried to meet a payroll, that this legislation is vital to our collective economic well-being. In that regard, any time that businesses spend on paperwork is time away from what they should be doing: creating jobs, investing, and contributing to a strong and prosperous economy.

Businesses have been asking us for some time to simplify our corporate tax structure. We've listened to their concerns and drafted a bill that goes some distance to meeting their needs.

As I said in October, there will be a period of transition, not just for business but for some of our staff. There are still steps to be taken before we conclude a full tax collection agreement, but we know that at the end of this process, some people who now work for us will be working for the federal government. To these people, I say: We know that change is not always easy. We will continue to work with you, with your bargaining agent, to help ensure that this process is both fair and transparent.

We now have a timetable for the process. We have committed publicly to having a single tax form in place for businesses beginning with the 2009 taxation year. The memorandum of agreement signed in October and the tax collection agreement that will follow represent important and positive steps in building a more productive working relationship with the government of Canada.

Ces accords, je l'espère, serviront de précurseurs à d'autres accords futurs, afin de mieux définir et élaborer des pratiques communes de collaboration, pour le mieux-être de tous les Canadiens.

But as I have said before on numerous occasions, now, more than ever, we need the federal government to own up to the rest of its responsibilities to this province. We've recently seen some good news in this regard, and we hope that this is a sign of many good things to come.

I look forward to the discussion that this legislation will generate in this House, and I genuinely appreciate the attention that I know members will give to it.

HIGH-OCCUPANCY VEHICLE LANES

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to talk about another greater success of the McGuinty government.

One year ago today, the government opened the first provincial high-occupancy vehicle lanes on Highways 403 and 404 with the goal of managing congestion and improving travel time for commuters. We heard that commuters were frustrated by the time it took to get to their destinations, and we responded. We knew that the delays they encountered on the road meant less time to spend with their friends and families. We opened our high-occupancy vehicle lanes last December so that commuters could get to their destinations in less time.

I am delighted to inform you that one year later, the HOV lanes are an unqualified success. Many groups have come forward with their support for this important initiative. Organizations such as the CAA and the Ontario Motor Coach Association see the value in building the HOV lanes.

Before the HOV lanes were built, a trip on Highway 403 eastbound during the morning rush hour took about 22 minutes. The same trip now takes about eight minutes in the HOV lanes.

The choice is obvious, and many commuters have recognized the benefits of these lanes. In 2003, only 14% of people travelled in carpools on Highway 403 eastbound. Now, nearly 40% of people are carpooling on the HOV lanes on Highway 403 eastbound during the peak rush hour.

Our HOV lanes are working, but there's room for more carpools. It's important to keep the momentum going and to keep the carpools growing. Indeed, I encourage all the members of this House and their staff to lead by example and carpool on a regular basis.

The high-occupancy vehicle lanes are also encouraging people to take public transit because the bus oper-

ators can offer faster, more reliable trips, and customers can be confident that their bus will not get stuck in traffic. GO Transit has reported that ridership on the bus routes using the HOV lanes is growing, and public transit agencies using these HOV lanes are reporting back that their buses arrive at their destinations on time and with greater consistency than ever before.

Of course, our environment also benefits as lane use increases with more and more commuters carpooling or taking transit.

Our government's plan to encourage carpooling and public transit use is working. Habits are changing. People who carpool or take public transit are telling us that the high-occupancy vehicle lanes allow them to spend more time with their families than on the road. If, for example, you were to take that 17 minutes that they save on the 404 every day, and when in 2007 the other lane is ready, we're talking two and a half hours that people will be able to spend with their friends and families every week. So commuters are telling us that their travel time is shorter.

But it's not just HOV and public transit users who benefit. Motorists in general also benefit. We've seen that the lanes both on Highway 403 and 404 are less congested, and we have seen that folks have shaved somewhere between eight and 11 minutes from their commute times simply because there are less cars on the road.

Our government is building on this success. By next summer, the HOV network will expand with the opening of the northbound HOV lane on Highway 404 north of Highway 401.

1410

Initial stages of construction are under way to add HOV lanes on the QEW between Oakville and Burlington, and we will also introduce high-occupancy vehicle lanes on Highway 417 in Ottawa between Palladium Drive and Highway 416.

High-occupancy vehicle lanes are part of the McGuinty government's plan for a sustainable transportation network across Ontario. We are building on this year's success and we are creating a transportation network that takes a holistic approach to keeping not only people but goods and services moving.

We have laid the foundation for this network. Rob MacIsaac, our newly appointed chair of our Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, is already working with municipal partners to plan for some exciting transit initiatives.

We have delivered on our promise to share the gas tax and provided municipalities with \$1.6 billion for new buses and increased services.

We are committed to extending the TTC subway to York University. Extending the subway line will help more than 65,000 students and faculty members at York University get to and from school quickly and conveniently. The subway extension is a solution that demonstrates the McGuinty government's commitment to supporting public transit in Ontario.

The federal government must come to the table with funding to make crucial transit projects happen in

Ontario. Our government is on the side of commuters who want to get to work and get home early, reliably and safely.

A sustainable transportation network is the key to Ontario's economic future and a crucial part of our plan to ensure that Ontarians continue to enjoy the highest quality of life.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

CORPORATE TAX

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to respond to the statement on the bill introduced by my colleague the Minister of Finance.

As we've stated before on behalf of the opposition, we're pleased to see this initiative moving forward. Work had been done under the previous Progressive Conservative government and continued under this government. I give the minister a commendation, and his staff and Ministry of Finance civil servants, for their efforts on this, as well as Mr. Flaherty and his officials at the Department of Finance nationally.

The minister will know that we'll look closely at this bill. There have been some problems in the past. You will recall that the previous finance bill, for example, buried deep in the bill, caused a reduction in the frequency of municipal elections without being mentioned by the minister or his PA. Just this past week, your colleague the Minister of Government Services brought in a last-minute amendment to increase taxes on cemeteries, for example. You're going pretty far when you're increasing taxes on the dead.

I want to use this moment to reinforce to the Minister of Finance the importance of allowing the income splitting for pension income that's been announced by the federal government to go through here provincially. That will be a big bonus and a big assistance to seniors and those living on pension income.

My colleague the leader of the official opposition brought forward our strong concern with the last-minute spending that's occurred, as cited by the auditor's report, in cabinet meetings going up to the end of the fiscal year. It seems like the only limit was the physical ability of the minister to sign cheques, to put them out the door. As Mr. Tory pointed out, the last three cabinet meetings saw the following: \$2.4 million a minute spent; the March 23 cabinet meeting, \$643 million, or \$3.5 million a minute; and the March 30 cabinet meeting, \$205 million, or \$1.4 million a minute.

The auditor's report had previously criticized this minister and this government for similar activities in previous budgets, including \$1 billion the year before. The minister decided to top that up with \$1.6 billion this last fiscal year. It's certainly no way to run a budget and no way to run a government.

The last caution I'd have is, we had hoped we would see actual tax reductions for working families and for seniors in this budget. The minister knows that Ontario has the most uncompetitive tax regime for businesses,

right next to Saskatchewan, in the entire country. We do hope that will be in the bill, or, if not, the next bill coming from the minister.

HIGH-OCCUPANCY VEHICLE LANES

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Our leader, John Tory, and our caucus are fully in support of HOV lanes. It should be clear to people who are familiar with this topic that when we were in government, under the leadership of Frank Klees and Norm Sterling, this process began in 2001-02. The McGuinty government is always anxious to take credit for initiatives by others, but fails to take responsibility for their errors under their watch. In fact, I think today they should stand up and apologize for breaking over 230 promises, for instance the \$2.6-billion health tax. You've got to recall also that the energy file is in a complete mess, and we still have many doctor shortages and patient delays. You should also stand up and say you're sorry for the evidence released this week by the Auditor General, not to mention just a couple: Hydro One, the culture of entitlement and children's aid's excessive and scandalous spending.

The real issue is the lack of a responsible response by this government to the AG's report. In fact, there's no action plan to curb the excessive account card or credit card culture of entitlement, no plan to look at vulnerable children under children's aid care, no plan to re-communicate the information on hospital wait times, and the risks go on. There's no plan also for the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority and letting it come to reality. Even your chair and vice-chair are reported as asking, "Where's the money?"

What about the extension of service of GO Transit? What about the mid-peninsula corridor? What about the Highway 407 east completion? Minister, the HOV lanes are not going to solve the gridlock problem, and you should know that. Clearly the McGuinty government has no plan of any sort to solve the gridlock crisis.

People do remember that it was this government that started the process, and it will be this government that will fail to complete their promises, as has been the case. What's needed here is a real action plan for this government to address the findings of the Auditor General. With less than eight months to go, the Liberal government is falling into its own potholes. I say to the minister, as you said in your remarks, the people are still frustrated. Why did you bring up your little entourage to north Toronto, causing—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

CORPORATE TAX

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I'm now responding to the Minister of Finance. When the Minister of Finance stood up in October and talked about the new deal, I had this instant image of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the two finance ministers standing there together. I had it because they seemed to be, for the first

time, in absolute harmony. I am revisiting that same image in my mind here today because here they are again in absolute harmony.

I look down into what was said today because, quite honestly, it is impossible for me or anyone in this House—we don't have Superman in this House or Flash Gordon, who can read the 500 pages that were handed to me as we walked in here today. But I am very, very mindful of what may be contained and the secrets that may be contained.

Just from the minister's statement and what he had to say today, there will be a reduction of some \$90 million in taxes from the corporate sector to the province of Ontario. I have no doubt in my mind that the corporate sector is going to say, "Thank you very much for the \$90-million reduction," and well they should. If someone gave me a reduction of my income tax in that kind of largesse, I would say this was a good thing too. But I have to question a province and a government that has not been able to balance the budget in the first three years of its mandate and may not be able to balance the budget in the fourth and final year of its mandate, cavalierly coming to a conclusion, and a set of agreements that is going to take \$90 million from the people of Ontario and stop them not only from balancing their budget, but also the \$90 million that those corporate taxes could be doing for the benefit of ordinary people in this province. I have to wonder about the need for a variety of legitimate purposes that exist in Ontario.

I looked very quickly to see where those taxes were likely to be removed. The minister can correct me if he wants, but there seem to be four areas where the taxes are going to be lowered. The first one is the provincial corporations income tax, the second one is the life insurance tax, the third one is the corporate minimum tax and the last one is the corporate capital tax. I looked at these, and quite obviously this will be a boon to some businesses. Some businesses I suppose will deserve the money; others could possibly do without having to hand it back. It seems to me why it's happening is that the federal tax appears to be less than the Ontario tax, so the harmonization and us agreeing to the harmonization is agreeing to that reduction.

1420

I'm also very nervous, because the minister talked about continuing to work with the workers of this province, the public employees of Ontario, to try to come to some kind of agreement around human resource management issues. They have been working on this for months and months. In fact, when the minister stood up here in October and talked about this, they were probably at very much the same juncture. Nothing really has come to a conclusion, and although meetings continue to be held, there still is, as far as I am aware, a huge gap between what the workers of Ontario are requesting happen to them and what this government is prepared to offer. This has not been finalized and is nowhere near being finalized, and you will pardon me and pardon those public employees if they're just a little bit more than

nervous. They are left to wonder what is going to happen to them.

There is, finally, the potential and possible loss of expertise to the province of Ontario in this harmonization procedure. We have had excellent auditors in this province for many, many years. It has been said, and I believe it to be true, that the auditors more than 10 times pay their own salaries, for going out and auditing books, in monies that they are able to recover on behalf of the province from those companies that are reluctant to pay their fair share of taxes. That expertise is going to be lost.

Where this is most troublesome—

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: —as the Minister of Finance tries to intercede, is in those corporations that are not only in the province of Ontario but exist in all the provinces of Canada. It is very difficult for a federal auditor—it's easy enough for him to say how much a big corporation has made in Canada, but it's very difficult to say how much they've made in the province of Ontario versus Quebec, versus Nova Scotia or versus Alberta. It's very easy for large corporations to say that the profit was made in Alberta, where the tax is less. I am afraid there is a potential huge loss to this province.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO ONE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. People across the province continue to write me on e-mail about a man who quit his job and got a \$3-million severance payout. They just don't accept multi-year, multi-million dollar severance arrangements for someone who quits.

Yesterday, the Minister of Energy suggested that he was merely following advice, that he was merely adhering to contractual provisions. I have the details, as we've heard shared in the House, of Mr. Parkinson's contract; they're public. They indicate that he gets severance if he's terminated without cause. It goes on to say that he gets severance if termination without cause comes about in the form of his contract not being extended in 2010. It says nothing about compensation if he just quits in 2006.

The government says he quit. The board says he quit. If this is really the case, why did he get the \$3 million?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): This government is proud that it sent the Auditor General in not only to Hydro One and to OPG but across the broader public sector. What I said is that, in all the circumstances, the best advice we had is that the least costly alternative for all concerned was the course of action that was in fact pursued.

This government is determined not only to identify the types of challenges that were identified by the auditor but

moreover to act on them in a responsible and timely fashion that will ensure the ongoing integrity of the public utilities in Ontario.

Mr. Tory: What the minister in fact said yesterday was that those are part of contractual provisions that are entered into that you simply can't ignore. The fact is, the minister is right: A contract is a contract. If the payment of \$3 million actually followed what the contract said, this would be quite a different discussion.

The minister said that this gentleman quit. If that's true, there was no payment provided for under the contract. The cheapest option under the contract would have been to give one of those thank you cards and away he would go. If you ordered Hydro One, I say to the minister, to fire him, then you should stand up and clarify the record. Do you want to be straightforward with the people of Ontario and confirm that you ordered him terminated? Why don't you just do that?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I would suggest to the Leader of the Opposition that in fact what we said was that under the circumstances, under the conditions, and with the advice that we received, the course of action that was pursued is the least costly way of proceeding. But make no mistake: We are proceeding.

There is much more to be done. We will have more to say about compensation levels in the public utilities. We will have more to say about how we're going to go forward. We cannot ignore the Auditor General's advice. That's why we put the Auditor General in place. That's why we opened up Hydro One and OPG.

The final thing I would note to the Leader of the Opposition is that what I said yesterday was quoting him. That's what you quoted back. You said on December 6, "But those are a part of contractual provisions that are entered into that you can't ignore." You can't ignore a whole range of things. That was said in this House. It was not just implied; it was said. There's a range of factors that were taken into account. On balance, the advice we had was that the way it was dealt with by the board was in fact the least costly way of dealing with the situation in all of the circumstances.

Mr. Tory: The minister and I do agree on this: that a provision of a contract is a provision of a contract. What I'm saying here is that we all have seen the provisions of this contract; they're public. I'm asking the minister to direct us to the provision of the contract that says that if the man quits his job—as the minister said, as the board said—where does it say in the contract that he gets \$3 million? That leads only to the conclusion—because there is no such contractual provision that says that; there's nothing that says, "If you quit, you get \$3 million"—that there was multi-million dollar, multi-year payout to someone who quit outside of the contract. So what I'm asking the minister is this: Isn't it true that you told the chair of Hydro One to get rid of Mr. Parkinson and that if she didn't do it, you would; and that that's what really happened here? All we're entitled to is a straightforward explanation. You can't hide behind the contract. We know what it says; it doesn't say, "You get

\$3 million if you quit." Why did he get the \$3 million if he quit?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: In all the circumstances, the advice of the board was that this was the least costly alternative in dealing with the situation. We rely on the board to make those determinations. They in fact made those determinations. I would remind the member opposite that under the previous Tory administration they spent \$40 million for the American dream team to come in and fix up OPG, to deal with nuclear refurbishment. Not only did they not deal with it, but the projects came in over budget and over time, and the result was a lot of changes that this government did make. We brought in freedom of information. Your government refused to do that.

We brought in the auditor for good reason. The auditor has given a number of recommendations that this government is acting on to improve the integrity of all aspects of the broader public sector. We're acting on those recommendations. In all the circumstances, based on the advice we had, this was in fact the least costly—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. On August 31, 2006, there was a story in the St. Catharines Standard which quoted the Premier as saying that the protestors staying on the Douglas Creek Estates land "in some kind of permanent way, through the winter, for example—that is not acceptable to us."

The promise was that this would be resolved by winter, that the protestors would not be occupying the land come winter. There are now nine days left until the official start of winter. The protestors have been on the land for 289 days. Can the Premier tell us whether this commitment that he made, this promise that he made, will be kept, or will this join another in the long line of promises that will in fact be broken?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm pleased that things are in a more peaceful state these days in Caledonia. I gather this comes with some regret on the part of the leader of the official opposition.

We are pleased that the three levels of government have been working well together. We're pleased that we've been able to organize a negotiating table to bring all parties together. We're pleased we've been able to purchase the land in question and hold that in trust pending the outcome of these discussions. We're pleased that we've been able to work with the community to ease tensions. I'm sure that the leader of the official opposition would, under all circumstances, not want to do anything that will contribute to anything other than goodwill and the relief of tensions.

1430

Mr. Tory: The fact of the matter is it was the Premier of Ontario, the very same Dalton McGuinty, who said

that “it would not be acceptable to us”—referring to his own government—to have these people staying on the land through the winter. He said this, not me.

I was down there last week to meet with the residents. It's the sixth time that I've been there, and I did what the Premier has refused to do—you haven't even visited: I accepted the invitation to stay overnight with one of the families and to meet with a whole lot of the people who have been very directly affected by that. What I heard about from these people—when you talk about the lack of tension there—was the disruption to their lives, which continues. I heard about new buildings being built on the land by the protesters, notwithstanding that your government has said there is a moratorium. I heard about kids going to school every day past barricades and police cars. I heard about people trying to put up Canadian flags and being told they can't.

These are people who see two sets of rules. They see no one in government standing up for them. My question is this: They were counting on you to keep your word about when these people would be off the land. Do you intend to do it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I understand why the leader of the official opposition and his party are eager to pour gasoline on the situation, but we're going in a different direction.

The houses that are referenced by the leader of the official opposition: The fact is that there are houses coming down. It is true that there was some kind of a security hut that has been recently erected.

As the leader of the official opposition well knows, this is the subject of a dispute which has been outstanding now—well, it predates Confederation. The first claim in the area was filed in 1980. In 26 years, 29 claims have been filed and only one has been settled. We will continue to work with the federal government, but I know that the First Nations community involved understands this, that the community of Caledonia understands this and that the federal government understands this. There is an ongoing dispute between the Six Nations community and the federal government. We will do our part to maintain peace and stability as best we can.

Mr. Tory: The fact is, it was you who said it would be unacceptable for them to stay there for the winter. You said that. And the other fact is that there are new structures being built on that land as we speak.

Another promise made by your government to the people of Caledonia is that compensation for residents directly affected by the blockade would be forthcoming. That promise was made on June 16, and here we are, six months later, and the residents confirmed to me when I visited there that there has been nothing done for them—not a postcard, not a letter—nothing, no proposal of any kind. It just underscores how empty these words are about what is unacceptable to you or what you will say you're going to do to help these people who have been so dramatically affected by this whole regime.

How is it you can do up a cheque for \$3 million late on a Friday afternoon to accommodate one desire you

have to solve one matter, and yet these people are told, six months later, nothing is happening, nothing has been done, but you promised you would. Why don't you keep that promise?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition tells us he's been there a half-dozen times. It wouldn't surprise me if he was down there 12 more times because—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I need the government House leader and the Minister of Agriculture to restrain themselves, and the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant. Premier.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: With respect to financial support, the members of this House will know that our government has purchased the Douglas Creek Estates. We have put forward monies for a business assistance plan. We provided money for signage and markings on the land. We provided money for assistance for residents already. We provided money for a marketing campaign. We provided money for a new school fence and security cameras. We provided money for communications help in the municipality, and other areas as well.

The fact of the matter is that the federal government, thankfully, is now taking a lead role in this area. They are leading the negotiations at the table, and we look forward to them developing a significant proposal that they can table for us to lend our—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

MEMBERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. People across Ontario are now aware of the outrageous salary increases granted by the McGuinty government to Hydro executives, including Mr. Parkinson's \$3-million golden handshake. As a result, hard-working people are asking the McGuinty government to be more thoughtful in spending the people's money.

Premier, you promised to listen to the people; you promised open and transparent government. In that context, how do you justify trying to ram through a 31% pay increase?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I look forward to hearing more from all of the NDP on this particular issue.

There is a 40% gap between what members of this Legislature make and what the members of Parliament in Ottawa make. I think that is unacceptable, and I think it's unsustainable. I think we have a shared responsibility to help close that gap. I'm not asking that we close that entirely. I'm saying that to establish a gap of 25% is reasonable and fair in the circumstances.

The federal government transfers money to us so we can deliver health care. We deliver education, not only at the post-secondary level but all the way from JK through the post-doctorate level. We assume principal responsibility for our national environment. We assume prin-

cial responsibility for strengthening our economy. We have the same ridings and the same constituents. I think that 40% by way of a gap is unsustainable, and I think 25% is fair.

Mr. Hampton: Well, Premier, if you want to talk about context, let's talk about context. Already, Ontario MPPs are the second-highest-paid provincial representatives in Canada. Ontario MPPs already are paid more than MLAs in Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Manitoba—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I need to be able to hear the leader of the third party place his question.

Mr. Hampton: It appears that I have touched a nerve with members of the Liberal government.

Ontario MPPs already get paid more than MLAs in Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Your proposed 31% pay hike is completely out of touch with the kinds of pay increases ordinary working Ontarians are getting.

I ask you again, Premier: Given the huge pay increases you already gave to your Hydro executives, how do you justify ramming through a 31% pay hike here and now?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The fact of the matter is that during the course of the past 15 years, members of this Legislative Assembly have experienced nine pay freezes, and in one of those years we experienced a 5.5% pay cut.

I still have family in Timmins, and although I may not agree with Mr. Bisson, they tell me he works very, very hard. The leader of the NDP believes Mr. Bisson should make 40% less than his federal counterpart; I disagree with that.

I can't do an education event in Toronto and not have Mr. Marchese there. The leader of the NDP may believe that Mr. Marchese deserves 40% less than his federal member, but I disagree, and I say that about that caucus, and that caucus, and our caucus. I say a 40% pay gap is unsustainable. We shouldn't apologize for saying that all we're looking for is a 25% pay gap between MPPs of this House and members of Parliament. I think it's fair, I think it's justifiable and I think it's high time.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Final supplementary.

1440

Mr. Hampton: Premier, I believe that working Ontarians deserve fair pay and a decent pension, but I look around Ontario and I see 140,000 manufacturing and forest sector workers who have lost their jobs thanks to your government and who have no pay this Christmas. I look at one in six Ontario children living in poverty. I look at all the working families who are struggling because you won't raise the minimum wage, such that it's a living wage, to \$10 an hour. I ask you, Premier, in that context, after you've already rammed through huge pay increases for your friends the hydro executives, how do you justify ramming through a 31% pay increase now?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I don't know where the intervention of 31% is coming from; it is 25%.

I understand that the leader of the NDP is going to exploit this for his own political purposes. I think he's being unfair to his caucus; I think he's being unfair to the value that we ought to be associating with the work that is done in this Legislature.

We have the same ridings as our federal counterparts. We have the same number of constituents as our federal counterparts. I think you could make a very good argument to the effect that while they deliver us money for health care, we deliver health care. While they deliver us money for education, we deliver education, whether at the post-secondary level or from JK through to post-doctoral. We deliver when it comes to protecting our natural environment. We deliver when it comes to strengthening this economy. I think it's high time that we recognize that collectively we owe it not just to ourselves but to generations of MPPs to come that we attach real value to the work that is done in this House. I will not apologize for that, and he shouldn't stand in the way.

We've created an option for this leader of the NDP, if he so chooses: rather than acting out in this Legislature or, as his colleague did, outside this Legislature, they can actually take action and say they will not accept this increase. If that's the value they attach to their work, then they're welcome to avail themselves of that option.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Minister for democratic renewal. The Minister for Health Promotion will come to order.

New question, leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Apparently the Premier doesn't like it when people ask questions about his 31% pay hike. Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The member for York West will come to order.

Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: You see, Premier, I care about working people across this province. I care about people who are trying to—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. This can't go on. The next member that I hear interjecting will be named.

Mr. Hampton: I care about those folks who haven't seen a pay increase and are certainly not going to see a 31% pay increase. Reaction to your 31% pay hike proposal has been swift and it's been negative. On Citytv's online poll, a large majority of respondents call it "ridiculously high." On the Toronto Sun online poll, 92% of respondents say the pay hike is too high. And radio call-in shows are buzzing with callers angry about this. I say again to you, Premier, when lots of Ontarians are being told, "Work harder, work longer for the same pay," how do you justify what is a 31% pay increase under Dalton McGuinty?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP is right in this regard: There has never been and there never will be a good time for any politicians, to my knowledge, on

the face of this planet, to give themselves a pay increase. Because we've been uncomfortable with that notion, that's the reason why, during the course of the past 15 years—we froze our pay for nine years. During another one of those 15 years, we cut our pay by 5.5%.

We find ourselves in a position now which I believe is unsustainable. I know that because I've experienced this in the past, and I fully expect that Mr. Layton's office, Mr. Harper's office and Mr. Dion's office will begin to scour this Legislature for hot prospects and will make them a very inviting, very seductive offer. They'll say: "Come to work in Ottawa. I'll give you a 40% pay hike, just like that. I'll give you a pension the likes of which you could never have dreamt of."

I think it's time to be fair to the members of this assembly. I'm not looking for parity with the federal government; I'm saying, we'll take 25% less and we'll work just as hard.

Mr. Hampton: If I follow your line of argument, then the Legislatures of Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia would already be empty because their pay is in fact lower than the pay here. But that's not happening, Premier.

I can't speak for what may be happening within your government, but the fact that you may be having some trouble with your caucus is hardly a rationale, I think, for hiking pay by 31%.

This is what the *Globe and Mail* says: "But one has to wonder how many other working stiffs in the world ... can hope to see their pay increased by 25% at one fell swoop." In fact, when you add it up, it's a 31% pay increase. Then they quote: "Nice work if you can get ... it."

Premier, again: How do you justify ramming through a 31% pay increase under the cover of Christmas when the vast majority of Ontarians will not even see anything near that amount?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It will be up to each and every member to make their own call on this particular issue. We have specifically created an option in the bill, and I assume that the leader of the NDP will be availing himself of that option. I assume that perhaps one or two other members of his caucus will be availing themselves of that option.

But let me say to prospective NDP candidates for purposes of the upcoming provincial election: I will stand up for them. I will ensure that, should they enjoy the privilege of serving their constituents in this Legislature, they will be party to the new pay scheme—not the old pay scheme that Mr. Hampton would have them become embroiled in—because I think it's fair, not just for people on this side of the House, not just for members of the official opposition, but for everyone in this House. I'm not going to apologize for that. It's high time that we acted on this. The politics always dictate against this, and that's why for 15 years now we've done nothing. I think it's time for us to come together and attach real value to the work that is done by the members of this assembly.

Mr. Hampton: Gee, if only Dalton McGuinty would stand up for those folks who are struggling on minimum

wage. If only Dalton McGuinty would stand up for those poorest kids in Ontario who see the McGuinty government claw back \$250 million a year from them. If only Dalton McGuinty would stand up for all those people across Ontario who are being told, "You want to keep your job? You take a pay cut." Premier, I don't know about you, but I'd have a hard time looking those folks in the eye and then saying, "I'm going to hike my own pay by 31%."

I ask you again, Premier: When you deny an increase in the minimum wage to \$10 an hour, when you continue to claw back \$250 million a year from the pockets of the poorest kids in this province, when workers are taking pay cuts, how does Dalton McGuinty justify a 31% pay increase?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I guess we know for sure, then, that there will be at least one member of the NDP caucus who will be availing himself of the option to decline the pay hike.

Again, the single most important comparator—and it was set out by the Integrity Commissioner himself. We can look at councillors and we can look at mayors and we can look at judges and the like. But he said, "The single most important comparator is the federal MP." He tells us that we are in danger of becoming a farm team in Ottawa, where if you aspire to working in the higher echelons of public policy, then you would abandon Queen's Park as some kind of a backwater and make your way as hastily as possible to Ottawa. I see things differently. I attach real value to the work that is done here by all members of all parties.

1450

It's been 15 years. During the course of those 15 years, salaries were frozen for nine; in another one of those years they were cut by 5.5%. We do at least the same amount of work as our federal cousins. The comparisons to MLAs in other provinces are simply not fair. We have many, many more constituents than those other MLAs. We do at least the same work as our federal counterparts. I'm not looking for parity. I'm saying that we'll work just as hard for 25%—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Premier: Premier, as you know, just last week the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld the decision of arbitrators that certain employers will be liable to pay the so-called health tax for their employees. Effectively, the Toronto Transit Commission, the Hamilton fire department and the LaPointe-Fisher Nursing Home in Guelph will now be liable to pay the so-called health tax for their employees. This effectively creates a two-tier tax in the province of Ontario, where some people of the same income levels, in the same neighbourhoods, will pay different levels of tax—one set, none.

Premier, how many situations are like this in the province of Ontario? What will be the total burden to taxpayers as a result of this decision?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I think the government has made it clear from the day that the Ontario health premium was introduced that it is a tax which is levied on individuals. At that time, I made it clear that if collective agreements had the impact of shifting that responsibility from individuals to employers, that was a matter to be determined between an employer and its bargaining agent and the workers that work for that employer. I think what the Court of Appeal said in its judgment was simply that.

Mr. Hudak: I think I'll take issue with the minister's interpretation. In fact, at least these three employers, all public sector entities, will now be forced to pay the health tax, and that will be a new burden on taxpayers or these agencies.

The minister will remember that the Premier himself, on October 27, 2004, said, "If this situation persists, then we will take the necessary steps to introduce whatever clarity is required. Our intention remains the same today as it was from the outset: This is something that should be paid by taxpayers."

Minister, I remind you that you and your colleague Mr. Duncan have brought in not one, not two, not three, but 15 pieces of finance legislation since that time. Not a single one of those bills addresses this issue. It lingers today, putting a burden on taxpayers and on these entities. We now know that this health tax was revealed to be nothing but a greedy tax grab written on the back of a napkin without thinking through these types of occasions.

Minister, please tell me that the bill you brought forward today, or the one you're bringing forward tomorrow, is going to correct this situation. You've had two years.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I can only reiterate, the government made it perfectly clear when the bill was introduced that the premium represented a tax on individuals. What the court said is that if a collective agreement, as reviewed by an arbiter, determines that the employer has through that collective agreement assumed the individual liability of individual workers for that premium, that would shift the liability. I'm quite comfortable with that. I think the law is clear and I think the judgment of the Court of Appeal is clear.

I think what is even clearer, I tell my friend, is that \$2.6 billion is now being applied to better health care around this province. That means more nurses, that means more access to family doctors, that means transformation of primary care. That's the real issue here.

NATIVE CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, last year you tried to take away the power of aboriginal communities to govern child welfare for themselves, and First Nations at that time forced you to back down on that. On November 30, you snuck those

very same rules about customary care in through the back door by regulation without even consulting First Nations.

The Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians wrote to you on November 28, pleading with you not to bring in this regulation because it does exactly what they asked you not to do during Bill 210: It takes away their right to govern child welfare for their own children. Minister, why did you ignore their letter and their rights?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): The member from Hamilton East knows that what she says is absolutely not accurate. I have worked more closely than any other member of this House with aboriginal communities over the past almost 18 months. In fact, 35 amendments to Bill 210 were actually applied when it came back to this House for third reading.

We have taken several steps to demonstrate that it is our government's interest to ensure that aboriginal kids are cared for wherever possible by aboriginal children's aid societies. That is exactly what is happening now in terms of our realignment of resources and kids in northern Ontario between non-aboriginal societies and aboriginal societies, and we will continue along that line.

Ms. Horwath: Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, the letter says, "We will not compromise our original position by allowing the implementation of a ministry-driven policy that does exactly what the withdrawn section 44, part 223 proposed to do in Bill 210." The minister should know darn well that she is doing exactly what she promised not to do. How can you go ahead and take on this action when you know that First Nations children have a right to have care provided that's developed by their own people in their own communities? That's the fundamental fact.

The same letter says that your ministry is giving \$1.4 million to develop alternative dispute resolution but only \$100,000 to aboriginal ADR. We also know that they're desperate for designations of more native child welfare agencies, for funding of band representatives. They are desperate for the respect that they deserve from the McGuinty government.

Minister, the auditor's report showed a whole bunch of spending that was inappropriate by children's aid societies. How can you then justify First Nations getting so little money to create a child welfare system that works for their children, especially when you know darn well that their children are overrepresented in the child welfare system?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I had the very real pleasure of traveling to Kenora in the summer of this year to designate a new aboriginal children's aid society, Anishinaabe Abinoojii. We are in the process right now of realigning resources, which means more money, and the associated kids from the care of non-aboriginal societies in northern Ontario to aboriginal societies in northern Ontario.

There is another aboriginal family and children's services organization that we are working with currently towards designation. Kunuwanimano has been working closely with my ministry, and I am actually eager to have

that process move along more quickly than it has been moving. To that extent, my deputy minister and assistant deputy minister will be in Timmins to meet with that organization on Friday of this week, because I am very eager to move this along a lot more briskly than it has moved to date.

I have to tell you that I'm very proud of the record of our government in working with aboriginal communities, because we respect those communities and we respect the rights—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): My question is for the Minister of Labour. Yesterday was a historic day in the province of Ontario. Yesterday, Bill 211, an act that puts an end to mandatory retirement, came into effect. Your parliamentary secretary toured the province in 2004 chairing many consultations on how to end mandatory retirement and give Ontario workers the right to choose when to retire.

As a result of this government's consultative process, I believe we have created a well-balanced piece of legislation that addresses concerns raised during that process. At the heart of this issue is the right of all Ontarians to choose when to retire. Until yesterday, it was perfectly legal to discriminate against someone on the basis of age.

Minister, what is the government's core philosophy behind the idea that it's unfair to insist that people stop working simply because they're 65?

1500

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I thank the member for Willowdale for the question. Certainly over the past few days I've been asked on numerous occasions why we chose as a government to end the discriminatory practice of mandatory retirement. The answer is very simple: It was the right thing to do. Forcing capable, experienced and knowledgeable citizens to stop working because they've reached a particular age is discriminatory. The Human Rights Commission said the very same thing in 2001—it was discriminatory because, the Human Rights Commission said, it undermines the dignity and sense of self-worth of older workers. Premier McGuinty and our government agreed and we committed to ending this discriminatory practice. In fact, Barbara Hall, chief commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, joined us yesterday at an event marking the end of mandatory retirement.

As we get down to the business of crafting a fair and balanced piece of legislation, as we move forward, I believe we've succeeded. Mandatory retirement is an outdated, unfair, discriminatory concept in our modern society. It is wrong, and mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario is now history.

Mr. Zimmer: Minister, my constituents are happy that the government values the contributions of older,

experienced workers, so much so that it has created this legislation. We all know that our skills and knowledge do not disappear once we turn 65. Society should not lose the benefits that skilled and experienced workers bring to their workplace.

Through the consultation process, many concerns were raised on diverse topics regarding ending mandatory retirement. I've heard some concerns also through my constituency office and I've listened as passionate advocates and detractors have stated their views. Our government carefully considered each of these arguments and, in the end, created a fair and balanced piece of legislation.

However, Minister, concerns still persist, particularly around the one-year transition period and the CPP benefits issue. Could you take a moment and address these two issues?

Hon. Mr. Peters: Again, I want to thank the member for the question and, as well, thank the member for Oakville for the extensive consultations he undertook on behalf of the citizens of Ontario with this issue.

As we listened to people, one of the things that became obvious is that we needed to put a transition period in place. We needed to ensure that businesses were prepared for the transition to the end of the discriminatory practice of mandatory retirement. We needed to ensure that collective agreements were in place to deal with the end of mandatory retirement.

On the issue of pension benefits, there has been absolutely no change to the entitlement of CPP benefits. This is and will continue to be a federal program. All those individuals who are eligible to receive CPP once they turn 65 will have that ability to receive those benefits. Employees who choose to work past the age of 65 will stop paying into CPP once they reach that age of 65.

I know that something that's extremely important to many people in this province is the issue of seniors' discounts. Our concern to many was that there would be changes to seniors' discounts. We have said to our seniors that they've paid their dues and they deserve the discounts they receive. This legislation will do nothing to change those—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

GUELPH TURFGRASS INSTITUTE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Premier, details of a secret land deal involving the Guelph Turfgrass Institute have come to light. Your government is planning on closing the turfgrass institute in Guelph in order to sell the land to sweeten a real estate deal to a local developer. Given your Minister of Research and Innovation statement of last Monday in this House asking for the best and the brightest to come to Ontario to practise their research and development skills, how can you now sell off this valuable research station?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I think it's important that we take this opportunity, first of all, to clarify what our government has done with respect to research stations in Ontario. Our Premier listened to agriculture stakeholders who've said they wanted the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario to be the driver and the agency that determined how investment in research would be conducted in Ontario. Our Premier led that initiative and made that happen. ARIO is the agency that will determine how and what research in the area of agriculture will take place in the province.

It is my understanding that no final decisions have been made with respect to the particular property the member has identified, and that the Ontario Realty Corp., the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal and the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario are all dealing with this issue.

Mr. Chudleigh: ARIO has always directed research in Ontario and has always been an integral part of what research is conducted and where. The transfer of the research stations to ARIO ownership as of April 1, 2007, is a good idea. However, all those research stations should be transferred to ARIO, not sold off for land development as is being discussed and considered for this research station in Guelph. Even if it was to be moved, it would still ruin many, many years of ongoing research and development projects. And if it moves, the symbiotic relationship between this research station and the University of Guelph would be badly harmed, if not ruined. Minister, can you assure the House today that this research institute in Guelph will not be moved and will not be sold?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: To the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I think the member really needs to tell this Legislature the whole story. This district is part of a secondary planning process that was initiated by the city of Guelph itself. So of course, the ministry, through the Ontario Realty Corp., is working with our partners at ARIO, at the city of Guelph and certainly at the University of Guelph around the future of this. As the Minister of Agriculture has very clearly stated to this House, no final decisions have been taken.

Of course, I know the member would also want to tell the whole story, that when his party was in government, funds were severely cut back, many of these stations were not kept up and in fact were starved for funds, my colleague the Minister of Agriculture informs me. It's been quite a different story under the leadership of this Premier and this minister. I say to the member opposite that I'll compare the track record of this government versus yours—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): My question is for the Premier. Today we have members of the Trans Health Lobby as guests in this House. Transsexual people face harassment and discrimination in access to employment, accommodation, education and services, and also with health care. Eight years ago the provincial government removed funding for sex reassignment surgery. Your government has continued that policy. Alberta and Manitoba both offer sex reassignment surgery; so do the Canadian Armed Forces. When are you going to follow their lead and end this discrimination against those with gender identity disorder?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I want to say to the honourable member that I had a chance to sit and have a good chat with, I think, at least half of the delegation that was here. You will of course be aware that for the period of time we've been in office we've been awaiting a ruling from the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal, which has recently come forward. I want to let all members know that we'll of course abide by the direction provided there. It did not push for the relisting of these services, and yet I'm mindful of the opportunities to enhance the quality and quantity of services for people who are transgendered. We'll be looking to build on the things we've done to date.

The Sherbourne Health Centre wasn't in existence when our government came into office, but it is now and is providing a tremendous amount of new resource and support for transgendered individuals. We've also moved to ensure that those who require hormone therapy are getting very good, equitable access to it. We have taken steps.

There is, of course, more to do on all health-related fronts, and we'll continue to work with the Trans Health Lobby on these matters.

Ms. DiNovo: We're asking a very simple thing; that is, to relist sex reassignment surgery. This government can find the means to give itself a fat raise. It can't find the means to pay under \$200,000 a year for a medically necessary surgery for incredibly disenfranchised people. I ask, why are you refusing to respect these basic human rights and relist sex reassignment surgery today?

1510

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: First, the honourable member, again in her questioning, would seek to try and create a circumstance where there's a distinction between the advice and direction that was offered by the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal, which has ruled on very many of the points that you've made in your question, and at the same time, no acknowledgment that steps have been taken. She says that it's simple to do, but the point of the matter is that obviously, for these individuals, there's quite a lot involved. We have a broader responsibility beyond just the issue of sex reassignment surgery to address.

I had a conversation with individuals. My staff has been involved with the Trans Health Lobby and will continue to be engaged with them. They made it very clear to me in the time that we spent together in the cafeteria today that there are opportunities across Ontario to address other issues of importance to the trans community. We'll be looking at all of those and acting appropriately.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre):

My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, I know that you and our government have been working very hard over the past three years to build the province's partnership with municipalities after almost a decade of tension under the previous government. That spirit of co-operation is very much appreciated in London and across the province. For example, we enhanced the memorandum of understanding with AMO by giving our municipalities a say in the federal-provincial negotiations that directly affect them, and we enshrined that in legislation. Together with our municipal partners, we've launched a broad review that will fully examine the best means to deliver and fund key services in the province. We consulted with municipalities about changes to the Municipal Act that were referred back to this House by standing committee just yesterday.

Minister, could you please explain how these proposed amendments to the Municipal Act build on the strong and constructive relationship between our province and our municipal partners?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Let me first of all congratulate for the member from London Centre for all the active work that she has done on behalf of her community.

Mr. Speaker, as you may well know, Bill 130 is really about giving our municipalities greater autonomy so that the local councils can make the decisions that they are in the best position to make for the people in their community. Amongst other things, it means that there's greater flexibility by municipalities to pass bylaws with respect to matters ranging from public safety to the economic health and well-being, social and environmental well-being of a community; greater flexibility to pass bylaws to deal with the financial management of the municipality; greater accountability and transparency in its operations; broader power with respect to the governance models and structure that the municipality and its local boards may want to adopt; broader authority to take economic development, which is so crucial for our municipalities; and also more flexibility to delegate powers and responsibilities to committees, to boards and staff. It is to give the municipalities and their councils a much greater sense of autonomy than they've ever had before.

Ms. Matthews: This proposed legislation is clearly another example of our government's recognition that municipalities are responsible and accountable orders of government.

Minister, as you well know, my riding is in the city of London. You were there last week to see the snow for yourself. There has been an ongoing debate for some time in London about the existence of the board of control. In fact, it's the only board of control left in the province of Ontario.

Minister, a specific requirement in the Municipal Act is seen as an impediment to abolishing the board of control if city council so desires. This past September, the city of London council adopted a resolution that the city would request "an amendment to the Municipal Act to eliminate the provision requiring the approval of two thirds of council to eliminate the board of control."

I believe, Minister, and I know you do too, that municipalities should have broader powers with respect to their governance structures. What steps have you taken to ensure that the city of London has more autonomy, and particularly more power over the existence of the board—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: First of all, it's our hope that, with the co-operation of all parties in the House, this bill will be given approval before Christmas so that municipalities and councils can enjoy the greater levels of autonomy that they've been given under the act, hopefully starting as early as January of next year.

Yes, our government believes that local solutions are best determined at the local level and the manner in which the board of control is elected, or whether or not there should be a board of control, is best left to the council of London. It's a perfect example of the kind of local autonomy that we're seeking in the act. We made many amendments along those lines, which were specifically requested by municipalities to deal with their specific circumstances.

During our committee hearings, the city of London requested that we amend Bill 130 so it would no longer require the support of two thirds of council to dissolve their board of control, and we listened to them, as we did to other municipalities. If Bill 130 is passed, the city of London may dissolve its board of control by a simple majority vote and without the necessity of going to the OMB.

When Bill 130 is passed, it will usher in a new era for municipal responsibility in the province of Ontario. If—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. New question.

WATER SUPPLY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. It's a water level question in the Great Lakes that I'm concerned about, and it affects a number of my colleagues' ridings, as well.

Minister, you may be aware that the Georgian Bay Association commissioned the Baird water levels report,

at a cost to the foundation of the Georgian Bay Association of some \$250,000. The Baird report concluded that erosion and the continual ongoing dredging of the St. Clair River are causing water levels on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay to drop at a greater rate than ever before. The Baird report convinced the International Joint Commission that the erosion of the St. Clair River is a major cause of low water levels on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. More water is in fact flowing out of Lake Huron than is coming into it.

Minister, can you explain what steps your ministry is taking to stop the declining water levels on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I certainly have a professional interest in this, and a personal interest, as I enjoy recreation on the Great Lakes.

We are very well blessed in Ontario to have access to 20% of the world's fresh water, just on those Great Lakes. We are very concerned about the quantity of that, and of course, as you know, that's why we entered into an arrangement with eight neighbouring American states and with the province of Quebec called the Great Lakes Charter Annex: in order to maintain the water levels.

It's interesting to note that 98% of the water in the Great Lakes was there during the ice age, so we have done a pretty good job of maintaining that. But I do share the member's concern. We do work with the International Joint Commission, and we work with the neighbouring states also through the Charter Annex to find ways to preserve the levels of these lakes.

Mr. Dunlop: Minister, the low water levels on Georgian Bay have a very negative effect on property values and shoreline appearance, on access to the dozens of marinas on Georgian Bay and Lake Huron and the jobs they create. But equally, there are many wetlands on Georgian Bay and in the Muskoka-Parry Sound area—many wetlands that are drying up, affecting wildlife, fishing and the natural heritage system.

In the past, when problems occurred on the Great Lakes, partnerships were created, that still exist today, to rehabilitate environmentally sensitive areas on the Great Lakes. I know the federal government has committed to mitigation funding. Ministers Ambrose and Clement made that announcement in September. Can I ask you, Minister, when will the McGuinty Liberals and your ministry show leadership and provide mitigation funding as well to find a solution that will stop the declining water levels on our Great Lakes?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: Again, I appreciate the member's interest, and I want to say to him that the McGuinty government is committed. We will be part of that five-year study, and the Ministry of Natural Resources has dedicated an engineer to be working on that study.

We take this issue very seriously. There is an incredible potential environmental and economic impact if we don't maintain the levels of the Great Lakes and the surrounding watershed.

I appreciate the member's interest, and I want to let him know that we are dedicated to this issue.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, in July 2006, the Ministries of Community and Social Services and Health signed an agreement called the long-term-care home access protocol for adults with a developmental disability. The protocol has been condemned by Family Alliance Ontario. They point out that on page 2 the protocol encourages developmental sector service providers now supporting adults in existing group homes in the community to transition these adults into long-term-care homes because "this will create community-based capacity to accommodate residents moving from the DS facilities"—Huron, Rideau Regional Centre and the Southwestern Regional Centre.

Minister, adults with developmental disabilities in existing group homes or those being supported in the community should be fully assisted to age in place in the community, and residents from the DS facilities should be allowed to do that too. Why is your protocol pushing agencies to push adults in existing group homes into long-term-care homes?

1520

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I thank the member of the third party for her question. I want to assure the member from Nickel Belt that when individuals are leaving one of our three institutions, we place them in a group home. I don't know where the member gets her information, but these individuals have the same rights as any other citizen in Ontario. So if they need to go to a long-term-care home, they will go to a long-term-care home. In my review, perhaps three individuals went to a long-term-care home. All the others were placed in group homes in the community.

Ms. Martel: In January 2004, there were 1,125 adults with developmental disabilities in long-term-care homes; in January 2006, there were 1,202—77 more. We don't want to see a protocol that forces even more developmentally disabled adults into long-term-care homes. Minister, your protocol also says that additional money from the developmental services sector will be given to long-term-care homes so they can provide "sufficient supports and services to accommodate the person's developmental disability so that the safety and well-being of all residents is not affected." That means that long-term-care homes don't have the expertise necessary to meet the needs of adults with developmental disabilities. Agencies in the development services sector do, and you should be funding these agencies and families to deliver and receive a broad range of supports in the community. Why are you prepared to top up long-term-care homes to support adults with developmental disabilities when existing agencies could properly do the job themselves—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: I want to assure the member of the third party that when individuals leave one of our

three institutions, they are placed, first of all, in a community close to their family. The transfer of these individuals is done with a lot of sensitivity. The family is involved, and we place the person where it's best for them to be. If it's in a long-term-care home, they have the same rights as other individuals in Ontario. But I can say to the member that the large majority of them, if not all, have been placed in group homes.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would like to introduce, in the Speaker's gallery, Eva Tomalin, who has served the constituents of Algoma-Manitoulin in my constituency office for nearly 20 years.

PETITIONS

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I've received more petitions to do with the Mary Lake dam.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member for Hamilton East.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, I'm glad you saw me through the crowd. Thank you very much. This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads:

"Whereas people relying on assistance from Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario disability support program (ODSP) face increasingly severe hardship because the

McGuinty government failed to keep its promise of regular annual increases; and

"Whereas in 2003, McGuinty promised to tie OW and ODSP rates to the real cost of living but broke that promise once elected; and

"Whereas current OW and ODSP recipients often don't have enough money for food after paying the ever-rising cost of living for rent, utilities and transportation costs; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government continues to cut back on necessary supports such as the special diet supplement and the national child tax benefit, taking even more money away from Ontario's most vulnerable;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government raise OW and ODSP rates immediately by 3% annually; and

"That the McGuinty Liberal government close the 21.6% gap left by the Harris Conservatives; and

"That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately end the clawback on the national child tax benefit; and

"That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately reinstate the special diet supplement to Ontarians who have seen the benefit cut."

I will sign it as well and send it to the table by way of page Sarah.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I've got a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly under the title "Access to Trades and Professions in Ontario." It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification

requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most individuals and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I affix my name in full support.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have petitions sent to me by SEIU. They read as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, in June 2003, Dalton McGuinty said Ontario Liberals are committed to ensuring that nursing home residents receive more personal care each day and will reinstate minimum standards, and inspectors will be required to audit the staff-to-resident ratios; and

"Whereas Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, in October 2004, said that the Ontario government will not set a specified number of care hours nursing home residents are to receive each day; and

"Whereas Ontario nursing home residents still receive the lowest number of care hours in the Western world; and

"Whereas studies have indicated nursing home residents should receive at least 4.1 hours of nursing care per day; and

"Whereas a coroner's jury in April 2005 recommended the Ontario government establish a minimum number of care hours nursing home residents must receive each day;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario immediately enact a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of nursing care for each nursing home resident per day."

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

1530

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member for Peterborough.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for your nice reception last night. Everybody had a great time. Your warm hospitality was shared by a lot of people.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Sarah.

ORPHANED DEER

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): Over 2,500 people have signed this petition to reverse the decision made to seize a domesticated deer from Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Straby.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario....

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Department of Natural Resources listen to the public outcry which is demanding just one thing: Bring Bam Bam home to the Straby family" by Christmas.

I support it and affix my signature.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Although Bill 124 passed last night, I promised Satar Amin of Mississauga and Gurjeet Gill of Brampton that I would read their petition anyway. It goes as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

I join with everyone in thanking all members for the passage of Bill 124. I'll ask page Colby to carry it for me.

CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): My petition from the riding of Durham reads as follows:

"Whereas the Lung Association's women and COPD national report 2006 reveals that more than 425,000 Canadian women have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and more than 4,300 will die of the disease this year; and

"Whereas the women and COPD national report indicates that since 2000, female mortality due to COPD has risen at double the rate of breast cancer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support a call for early diagnosis and optimized management of COPD to reduce illness and suffering;

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the Ontario Lung Association's COPD advisory panel report to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on the prevention and management of COPD in Ontario; and

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario endorse a comprehensive strategy to address COPD in this province."

I'm pleased to sign and support this on behalf of constituents in the riding of Durham and present it to Gloria.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): This is a petition from the Canadian Federation of University Women in Orangeville. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan;

"Whereas Premier McGuinty decried the discriminatory nature of the NCBS clawback and vowed to end this practice in his first mandate;

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

I agree with this petition. I sign it and send it to the table by way of page Philip.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm pleased to read a petition sent in to me by my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, to whom I send my greetings and those of the members present. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and to ask page Colby to carry it for me.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition circulated by the Sisters of Our Lady Immaculate Marian Residence in Cambridge. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the proposed Long-Term Care Homes Act is extremely lengthy and complex and requires full and extensive parliamentary and public debate and committee hearings throughout the province; and

"Whereas the rigid, pervasive and detailed framework proposed is excessive and will stifle innovation and flexibility in the long-term-care sector; and

"Whereas the additional burden, red tape and punitive measures imposed by the proposed legislation will aggravate and exacerbate the chronic underfunding of the sector, to the detriment of residents of the homes; and

"Whereas the proposed legislation will have serious implications for the viability of the for-profit and not-for-profit, charitable and municipal long-term-care sectors;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We demand that the McGuinty government withdraw the proposed act, or remove the offending sections, and fulfill its commitment by a substantial increase in funding on a multi-year basis in the order of the promised \$6,000 per resident, per year."

As I agree with the petition, I affix my name thereto.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUBLIC SERVICE OF ONTARIO
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
AYANT TRAIT À LA
FONCTION PUBLIQUE DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Phillips moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 158, An Act to revise legislation relating to the public service of Ontario by repealing the Public Service Act, enacting the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006 and the Ontario Provincial Police Collective Bargaining Act, 2006 and making complementary amendments to various Acts and by amending various Acts in respect of the successor rights of certain public servants / *Projet de loi 158, Loi visant à réviser des lois ayant trait à la fonction publique de l'Ontario en abrogeant la Loi sur la fonction publique, en édictant la Loi de 2006 sur la fonction publique de l'Ontario et la Loi de 2006 sur la négociation collective relative à la Police provinciale de l'Ontario, en apportant des modifications complémentaires à diverses lois et en modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne la succession aux qualités pour certains fonctionnaires.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Debate? Minister, is there any debate on this? Okay.

Mr. Phillips has moved third reading of Bill 158. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

1540

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice concerning this afternoon's debate on government notice of motion 277.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Is it agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that the time for debate on government notice of motion 277 be apportioned equally among the recognized parties in the House; and

That, at 5:50 p.m., the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of the motion and any amendments thereto; and

That, in the case of any division required, the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes, the members called in once and all divisions taken in succession.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Orders of the day.

HOUSE SITTINGS

HEURES DE SÉANCE

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, notwithstanding standing order 6(a), the House shall continue to meet until Thursday, December 21, 2006, at which time the Speaker shall adjourn the House without motion until Monday, March 19, 2007.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Debate?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I'm the person who is moving this particular motion and I'm delighted to be able to have the House sit even further into the year, even though the federal House has completed its business or is going to complete its business. From time to time, we have to ensure that there is ample time for debate of all legislation that comes forward. I must say, if I may comment on what has happened to this point in time, there has been a very busy legislative agenda which has been dealt with to a very large extent by the government, the opposition and all members of the Legislative Assembly.

I want to say from the beginning that it's my job as the government House leader to deal with the two opposition House leaders—and with others, but primarily with the two opposition House leaders—to ensure that appropriate debate takes place on legislation before the House and that there's an allocation of committee time which is, again, adequate to deal with the issues before the House and before those committees and that ultimately my job

as government House leader is to try to ensure that the legislation is finally passed. But legislation does require some debate, and we do have more to deal with in this session. That is why the Legislature is being extended until next Thursday, and we'll have the time to debate a number of issues.

I want to review for the Legislature some of the bills that have been dealt with over that period of time. They've been significant, and I think the bills have been enhanced in their quality by the fact that amendments have been proposed—not always accepted but proposed—and indeed there has been an opportunity to have public hearings on a number of them. Our government has, in a general sense, been prepared to have public hearings on bills of great significance to the province.

Where there is a consensus that develops among the House leaders after consultation with the public and invitations for people to participate in terms of deliberations and committee through their submissions, we try to determine the length that may be required, whether there's travel that might be required and how much time might be necessary for what we call "clause-by-clause."

I must say that my characterization of the fall session is that it has worked well in this House. While the two opposition House leaders are there to defend the interests of their own political parties, and ultimately of the people they feel they serve, nevertheless, without getting them in trouble with their own caucus, I can say that both have been reasonable to deal with on matters related to legislation going through the House. So you won't find me standing in the House, railing on at the opposition about the length of time that some measures have taken to go through the House.

Part of that is because I've had the position of opposition House leader, and when you've had that, you of course frame your arguments through the opposition mentality or mindset, if you will. Understanding what the needs of the opposition are, I've endeavoured as much as possible—and it isn't always possible—to accommodate their needs and what they feel is necessary for legislation. Ultimately, a government has the majority, and what the government wishes to pass can pass. But it's important to have the debates we've had over this session.

We've had a long-term-care bill that was introduced, a bill dealing with seat belts, a bill on the budget, consumer protection, the referendum, the Public Service Act, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, the Health System Improvements Act, the Legislative Assembly Statute Law Amendment Act, and the Strengthening Business through a Simpler Tax System Act. Those are bills that were introduced specifically this fall. There were other bills that had been introduced previously and we were dealing with them.

We have second reading now completed on the blood sampling bill, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Act, the Mortgage Brokers Act, the Regulatory Modernization Act, the Independent Police Review Act, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, the municipal act, the Long-Term Care Act, the seat belt law, the fall budget

bill, consumer protection, the Public Service Act, and interim supply and concurrences. Still to do in terms of second reading would be Bill 155, the Referendum Act, and Bill 173, the Legislative Assembly Act.

I want to review what has happened in committee in this fall session: The blood sampling bill, the traditional Chinese medicine bill, learning to 18, which is an education bill, the Mortgage Brokers Act, the Ontario Human Rights Commission Act, the Fair Access to Professions Act, the municipal act, the seat belt act, the budget bill and the consumer protection bill.

We did not need committee on the Public Service Act. Sometimes we, as parties in the House, determine whether committee will be specifically needed, and there was a determination, having canvassed people out there, that there was not really a need to have committee, but we're always open to that. I think that particular bill passed this afternoon.

What happens in the intersession? You'll hear people say, "Well, the House isn't sitting, so you people are on holidays." I think members of the Legislature realize that of course that's not the case. First of all, committees sit, and there have been bills that have been referred. In the fall, first of all, Bill 103, the Independent Police Review Act, went to justice policy; Bill 69, the Regulatory Modernization Act, went to general government; Bill 140, the Long-Term Care Homes Act, went to social policy—and Bill 155, the referendum act, as well. So what happens in the intersession is that there are committees that are sitting for various purposes. I'm going to deal with that in a moment.

1550

But I want to talk about the ones where there was third reading now; that is, completed. That means the bill has gone through all of its stages except where it requires proclamation: Bill 14, Access to Justice; Bill 28, blood sampling; Bill 43, the Clean Water Act; Bill 50, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Act; Bill 51 dealing with the OMB and planning; Bill 52, learning to 18—as I've said, an education bill; Bill 65, mortgage brokers; Bill 107, Ontario Human Rights Commission; 124, Fair Access to Regulated Professions; 148, the seat belt law; 151, the fall budget bill; 152, the consumer protection act; and 158, the public service act; still to do as we extend this session of this Legislature in third reading is Bill 130, the municipal act.

So we have some business to complete next week in the Legislature: third reading of one bill, processing of another bill at second reading, and completion of a third bill which has been introduced.

But in the intersession, so that, again, members of the Legislature are familiarized with what we are doing, there are pre-budget hearings taking place in one of the committees. It's called the standing committee on finance and economic affairs. They go about the province and here in Toronto and conduct hearings on what people believe should be found in the budget. Bill 103, the Independent Police Review Act, will go out so that people will be able to comment on that. That will go to justice

policy. Bill 140, the Long-Term Care Homes Act, will be out there so that people can comment. I believe that is travelling as well so that people in communities other than Toronto will be able to comment in their own communities. Bill 155, the Referendum Act for the Legislative Assembly, has been referred. Government agencies would like to meet in the intersession, and there are some members who serve on that committee who would like to deal with matters that the public believes are important, that the members of the agencies committee believe are important. The public accounts committee always wishes to meet in the intersession to deal usually with what comes out of the auditor's report; they do some report writing. So there's a lot of good work being done in the committees.

I know for those who are not specifically attached to a committee that people are engaging in all kinds of meetings when the House is not in session, that they are catching up on their telephone calls—I'm sure that's happening now—on their correspondence, on meeting with various people in their community, meetings initiated by MPPs or at the request of others. So there's an opportunity to continue.

For those of us who are in the cabinet, we still have matters to deal with in our responsibilities within cabinet, but all members of the Legislature are tasked to deal with a number of important items.

This motion that I have this afternoon does permit us, as a Legislature, to continue. I know, as I said, that the federal House may be completed by now. It was certainly scheduled to be completed by the end of this week. I know that there are a lot of people who have things to do immediately prior to Christmas, but members of the assembly I believe are ready and willing to meet to deal with the further business re pieces of legislation and, of course, the daily question period and petitions and matters of that kind. So I am pleased to put this motion forward and I look forward to the approval—I won't say applause in this case, but certainly to the approval—of all members of the House, that they see fit to pass this motion this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member from, um—that's awful.

Interjection: Erie—Lincoln.

The Acting Speaker: Erie—Lincoln. I'm sorry. I'm having momentary lapses here today.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): Mr. Speaker, after all the quality time that we spend together in committee and as finance critics.

It's a pleasure to rise to address the motion before the House. I appreciate the comments of my colleague the government House leader and Minister of Tourism.

I know that some of my colleagues, including the member for Leeds—Grenville and, I believe, the member for Durham, will be addressing the motion as well, but there are a couple of items that I wanted to have an opportunity to comment on, and I appreciate the chance as part of the calendar motion.

One of the bills that my colleague the Minister of Tourism and government House leader had brought

forward in his reference to bills that have been before the assembly this session was Bill 152, which is effectively a consumer protection piece of legislation. There are a number of concerns that I wanted to bring forward about that bill particularly. One is—and I referenced it today during question period—the last-minute amendment that was brought forward through the auspices of the Minister of Government Services, Minister Phillips. Effectively, this last-minute motion increased the taxes on cemeteries. This was a change from what had existed in the bill. I understand the amendment was brought forward on the very last day, perhaps near the last hour of the session. We certainly have made a lot of the McGuinty government's voracious appetite for tax increases. I just didn't expect them to be increasing taxes on cemeteries as part of the massive tax increases we've experienced under the Dalton McGuinty regime, beginning with the infamous health tax, of course, which plucks up to \$900 from working families and seniors in Ontario—per taxpayer.

We did note in the House today that some recent decisions by arbitrators, backed up now by the Ontario Court of Appeal, are going to compel the employer to pay the so-called health tax on behalf of the employees in those groups, three of which are the Toronto Transit Commission, a long-term-care facility in Guelph, and the fire department in Hamilton, who now will have to come up with the funds from their budgets to pay for the health tax. Equivalently, we now have two classes of taxpayers in Ontario when it comes to the health tax: those who have to pay the tax and those who do not.

Two years ago, Premier McGuinty and his finance minister, Minister Sorbara, said that if these decisions came back this way they would bring forward legislation to reverse it to ensure that individuals pay the health tax, no matter what their employment situation. But, listening to the Minister of Finance today, it seems like he's backing down on yet another promise that he has made to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. But I digress a little bit.

The issue I wanted to bring forward deals with Bill 152 and the fact that at the last minute the minister brought forward a tax increase on not-for-profit cemeteries in Ontario. While on the surface of the issue one would see arguments for and against the amendment that the minister brought in, we need to make sure that's taken in context. Back as far as 2001, a process began that brought together all parties in the bereavement sector, whether funeral services, cemeteries, monument builders, religious cemeteries as well, to forge a consensus on how to bring this piece of legislation together—very important to the industry; a very important piece of consumer protection legislation. It may not have generated a great deal of media interest at the time, but nonetheless some excellent work was done. Unfortunately, five years later, after consensus had been achieved, after the consensus had been embodied in legislation: a last-minute change that pulls apart the consensus. I think it's going to cause an awful lot of problems, going ahead.

As you know, any time that there is this type of negotiation, consensus-building, there's give and take by all

parties. You cannot simply change one part of the deal without causing impact on other parts of the deal as well.

Political lobbying routes were used that obviously influenced the minister to make the change and increase taxes on cemeteries.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: As you know, my colleague from Peterborough would probably be very sensitive about increasing taxes in a last-minute amendment on cemeteries.

Let me read from a letter from the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals to the minister, dated December 3, 2006. It says:

"The property taxation component of schedule D, Bill 152, was achieved after detailed and lengthy discussions with the Ministry of Finance. It was reviewed, debated and endorsed by both the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the association of municipal clerks and treasurers of Ontario, the two municipal bodies responsible for the collection and administration of taxes in Ontario."

1600

Despite the fact that this had taken place over what was schedule D of Bill 152, the minister still made a last-minute change. That last-minute change provoked a very strong letter from a number of stakeholders and interested parties on the legislation. This letter to Minister Phillips—I'll read the list of signees—goes on to say—I'll read the letter.

"Throughout the last six years, the undersigned have engaged in a process which culminated in Bill 209 and reflected in schedule D of Bill 152. These were very difficult, protracted negotiations, yet on August 10, 2006, consensus was achieved among all participants.

"One of the key fundamental principles of the agreement was the recognition and acknowledgement of the validity of making a payment in lieu of tax to the care and maintenance fund if a religious, municipal or non-profit cemetery engaged in a 'commercial enterprise.' This principle is totally in keeping with the intent of the BSAC recommendations." I referenced those; they had taken place in 2001.

"The act as introduced is an important step in the provision of consumer protection legislation and regulation in the province of Ontario. This act clearly mirrors the consensus reached and reflected in the BSAC document dated November 23, 2001, and the round-table meetings and consensus of the summer of 2006.

"Therefore, we cannot support any amendment to this fundamental issue of taxation," and they strongly urge the minister not to bring forward the amendment. At the end of the day, he did so.

This letter is signed by Norris Zucchet of the Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries; Gary Carmichael of Arbor Memorial; John O'Brien, the president of the Ontario Catholic Cemetery Conference; Bob Young, the legislation co-chair of the Ontario Monument Builders Association; Joan Huzar, the past president of the Consumers Council of Canada; Al Gruno, the vice-president of the Federation of Ontario Memorial Societies; and Glen

Timney, the past president and legislation co-chair of the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals.

I hosted a press conference involving a number of these individuals where you had a broad range of interested parties, from cemeteries to monument builders and funeral professionals that are referenced here, the Catholic cemeteries, the Hebrew cemeteries, all objecting to the last-minute amendment made to the bill that increased taxes on the not-for-profit cemeteries in the province of Ontario.

It's regrettable, the way that this took place, but what's most regrettable is that it tosses aside years of hard work that had taken place through Justice Adams and the BSAC recommendations. The Speaker will probably remember the November 23, 2001, Bereavement Sector Advisory Committee Report to the Minister of Consumer and Business Services, which reflects the history of this file. In fact, it was the Red Tape Commission that began the consultation process and reported to the then Minister of Consumer and Business Services on February 6, 2001.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Tim, that was you, wasn't it?

Mr. Hudak: Actually, not at that point in time.

Mediation took place, facilitated by the respected and Honourable Justice George Adams, that was quite encouraging. The then minister, the Honourable Norm Sterling, directed staff to convene the Bereavement Sector Advisory Committee, BSAC, which brought forward a consensus report to the minister that formed the basis of legislation. I say to my colleague from Peterborough, I had the honour of bringing forward the legislation. My predecessors, Minister Sterling and Minister Runciman, had done a lot of the heavy lifting as part of the consultations.

The Honourable George Adams, QC, facilitated meetings on July 19 and September 13, 2001. Robert Dowler, then director of the marketplace standards and services branch at the ministry, facilitated meetings on June 21 and August 22, 2001. I had the pleasure of serving with Mr. Dowler, who I think is an outstanding, very hard-working civil servant. I'm pleased to hear that since then he has been elevated to a position of assistant deputy minister. Not to make Mr. Dowler blush, but I anticipate that he will one day soon join the deputy ranks. I hope to have a chance to work with him again.

So I know the work that had been done at consumer and business services with some strong staff. I know the commitments that had been made by those interested in the ministry, the countless hours bringing this consensus together, and it's very disappointing that the minister chose to, effectively, tear apart that consensus by bringing in a last-minute change to raise taxes on the cemetery sector.

I think my colleagues will know that there are ongoing consultations on the regulations impacting on the bereavement sector. To make those regulation consultations effective, you need buy-in from the various parties, who

will spend, as I said, countless hours reviewing the material. If they feel that they can't trust the process, if they feel that the process they have trusted to date changes at the last minute because of political lobbying or a minister who decides to change the course of history for whatever purpose, then I worry that future consultations are going to be very difficult to convene to finally get the set of regulations completed that stem from consumer protection legislation of 2002.

So I needed to make sure that history was on the record, why a number of us have objected to that last-minute change by the minister and why the press conference was brought forward. I certainly hope the minister will now hear advice from a broader spectrum of the bereavement sector and ensure that the original BSAC recommendations that formed the consensus are maintained going forward.

The other aspect of the report I wanted to bring forward was my disappointment in the lack of muscle behind the initiatives to combat mortgage fraud in the province of Ontario. I want to commend my colleague Mr. Tascona, the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, who had brought forward a very muscular bill to combat mortgage fraud and to help out people who have already been victimized by scam artists through mortgage fraud or property fraud. Mr. Tascona's bill, for example, would allow access retroactively to the compensation funds for those victims we have read about in the *Toronto Star* or seen on television on CTV and other media outlets. Regrettably, Bill 152 does not contain those provisions or other powerful initiatives brought forward by Mr. Tascona.

I think the last time I had a chance to refer to this legislation, I commended the work of Alan Silverstein, the well-known consumer advocate and successful lawyer, who I know has given advice on Mr. Tascona's bill and finds what was actually brought forward at the end of the day to be quite disappointing.

Lastly, there are a number of concerns related to the gaming provisions of the bill and what they actually mean. There has been an inconsistency between what the minister has said, what his policy advisers have said and other public statements by the ministry as to the actual effect of the ban on advertising on the Internet. I know my colleague from Niagara Centre had brought forward an interesting point, that while the government was bringing this bill forward on one day, at the very same time the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. was conducting a poker championship sponsored by an Internet gaming company. So the irony was not lost on members of the assembly, and I wondered if Mr. Gough, the current chair of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., was on a giant ladder trying to bring that banner down while the minister was introducing the legislation at the same time.

Mr. Leal: He got overtime pay for that.

Mr. Hudak: He may have received overtime pay, as my colleague from Peterborough said, or danger pay, because that would be one big banner and one large

ladder to bring it down. I know that was embarrassing for the government, to be saying one thing on one hand and doing the opposite on the other.

So those are my comments on the motion on the floor. I know my colleagues also want to share time, but I thought it important to get on the record some of the history that led up to Bill 152, the disappointing turn by the minister that did not reflect the work that had been done before, and my trepidation that all of the good work that has been done by Justice Adams, by my colleagues Ministers Sterling and Runciman, and by hard-working civil servants and those engaged in the industry, may face even greater obstacles going forward, because now they have good reason not to trust that the work that has been done in the past will continue.

Thank you very much for the time, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the comments of my colleagues on this motion before us.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Thank you kindly, Speaker. I propose to share the time allotted to the New Democrats with my colleague Andrea Horwath, the member for Hamilton East.

Let's understand exactly why this motion is being brought. The House calendar—which had fallen, to our chagrin, into disuse—indicates the dates when the House begins and when the session ends, and this session ends December 14. That's why the motion says, "Notwithstanding standing order 6."

1610

As the government House leader accurately illustrated in his comments that opened this brief debate, there had been significant effort on the part of the House leaders of the three caucuses, the three parties, to protect the interests of stakeholders to whom a particular caucus felt beholden, but also to understand that the government has an interest in seeing a reasonable amount of legislation passed. Opposition House leaders have a responsibility to ensure that matters—because at the end of the day, the government controls the agenda. You know that, Speaker. It's a majority government. They don't need the co-operation of opposition parties. Hell's bells, what are time allocation motions for if not to override opposition parties trying to do their job here in the Legislative Assembly?

So let's understand why the government is compelled to extend the House sitting by a week. Heck, this will extend the House sitting to the 21st. We've got the 22nd on Friday, the 23rd and 24th on Saturday and Sunday, and the 25th is Christmas Day. I'm not sure the House can sit; that's a statutory holiday. It wouldn't be fair to the staff here. I don't know whether Boxing Day's a statutory holiday or not.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): It is.

Mr. Kormos: Well, then, if it is, I'm prepared to wait until the 27th to come back. If the government wants to sit on the 27th, I'll be here on the 27th; New Democrats will be here on the 27th.

But let's understand. The government's not extending the sitting of the House so that we can discuss the plight of minimum wage workers in this province. The government's not extending the session by one week so that we can debate Ms. DiNovo's bill, which would raise minimum wage for those poorest and, yes, very hard-working women and men in our province to \$10 an hour immediately, in an effort to make it not just a minimum wage but a minimum living wage. No, that's not why the government's extending its session by a week. The government's not extending its session by a week to talk about the job losses of so many workers across this province, far in excess of 100,000 over the course of the last two years alone, most recently the 23 workers down at Haun Drop Forge. Mr. Hudak knows where Haun Drop Forge is down in Welland. Some of those workers may well live in his riding, in Port Colborne or Fort Erie or Wainfleet.

Ever been to a drop forge, Speaker? I grew up in the east end of Welland and Crowland, and we woke up in the morning to the vibration of the ground and went to bed to the thump of the hammer and the vibration of the terra because the drop forge industry was a significant part of the industrial nature of that community. These hammers would come down and they would vibrate the foundations of houses literally blocks away. It was dangerous work. Come down to Welland or Port Colborne or Thorold or St. Catharines. Go to Hamilton. You know who the forge workers are. They're the ones who can't count to 10 with just their hands because they have a finger or two or a hand missing.

Most of the hammers now are no longer drop hammers; they're horizontal hammers. You go there and it's a steady, rhythmic process, because down at Haun Drop Forge—and I toured that forge not too long ago. I was there with Tom Napper, who's the president of CAW Local 275. He was here in the gallery last week. The Haun Drop Forge makes high-quality hooks and connectors for safety equipment and repelling equipment, so this has to be very high-quality—high, high standards. You've got workers who are placing these rough castings into the hammer, one after the other, rhythmically. The worker has got to be handcuffed and chained to their machine so that the arm is inhibited from extending far enough that the fingers get caught in the hammer. But as we all know so tragically, from time to time, the safety devices on this equipment don't work the way they should; from time to time, maintenance is skipped in the interest of profit.

I remember back when I was practising law, I had only been practising for a year or two and a young worker came in, a young man. He was a college student; he was taking business administration. He'd been a hockey player—a very physically fit, good-looking young guy, except, you see, that his hands were missing. He had a summer job at one of the local factories. He never intended to be a factory worker. He wanted to carry on with his education and get involved in business administration, maybe pursue an accounting career. It's hard to

hold a pencil when you don't have any hands, isn't it? It's hard to work your word processor when you don't have any hands. It's a tragedy when it happens to a kid 20 years old, 21 years old, who hasn't even thought about having children yet, but who is never going to really be able to hold his baby when he does have one.

Those are the prices that workers pay in these factories. These are the workers who not only lose their hands and their eyesight and their health and their lungs, but they're losing their jobs now too: 23 workers at Haun Drop Forge as of January 31, 2007, are going to be out of work.

I heard the minister talk about the retraining programs that the province is going to engage in. I'm sorry, my friends, but a 30-year forge worker? What are you going to train him to do? It would take years before the calluses wear off enough so that he can do tender, delicate work. What are you going to do, train him to be a milliner or a seamstress? Come on. For the casino? The casino is laying people off. You know that because we've raised that here in this Legislature.

No, we're not coming back next week to talk about those workers at Haun Drop Forge or similar workers across the province—tens and tens and scores of thousands of them. Look, you know what happens. You're talking about less than a year on EI, and maybe a little bit of a half-baked training program that's futile but which people participate in because they're prepared to grasp at any straws. But when EI is over, you're on welfare. Families that raised kids and paid for mortgages and paid taxes on a hard-earned middle-class salary can be on welfare in the course of a year. You know what happens then: Marriages break up; people drink too much; if they've got access to drugs, they take too many drugs; kids drop out of college and university or lose all of their aspiration for going. And then we have human tragedies and yet more social costs that sometimes cannot be evaluated in terms of dollars and cents.

I suspect that Miss Horwath, with her passion for improving the WSIB, Ontario's workers' comp system, may well speak to the fact that this motion we're debating today would be so much more relevant if we were going to talk about WSIB benefits next week and the need to improve the lot of injured workers, severely injured workers—workers who are never going to work again, notwithstanding that they would love to. They dream about it, in between the bouts of pain.

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We're not coming back next week to talk about those families, the poorest families, almost inevitably single mothers raising kids as best they can—and by God, most of them are doing a pretty darned good job of it—who had their federal child benefit clawed back by this government, even though Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals promised they'd end the clawback. They promised these moms, they promised these kids, yet Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals continue to pocket, what, \$250 million a year, Ms. Horwath?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): That's right. Right about there.

Mr. Kormos: Some \$250 million a year clawed back from the poorest moms and kids in the province of Ontario. New Democrats would dearly love to come back next week to debate that.

Ms. Horwath: You're absolutely right.

Mr. Kormos: Let me tell you, Ontarians with disabilities, ODSP recipients, who have been tossed crumbs by this government over the course of these last three years: We New Democrats would dearly love to be here next week to talk about increasing the pensions, the allowances, the incomes of disabled persons who rely on those modest incomes and who struggle to survive because of the inadequacy of them.

People on social assistance benefits: You want to stigmatize social assistance. Do it if you dare, do it if you want to, but down where Mr. Bradley and I come from, when we see industry after industry after industry shut down, we see family after family after family forced onto social assistance, because there are no alternative jobs. The casino provided some respite for a period of time, but that's over now.

Hard-working, honest, decent, good people—hard-working middle-class income earners and taxpayers one year, within the course of 16, 17 or 18 months can be on welfare. There was a 21.9% cut to their benefits by the Conservatives during their period in government here at Queen's Park, and no restoration of that 21.9% by the Liberals since they've been elected over three years ago. That is a sad observation. New Democrats would dearly love to be coming back here next week to talk about people on social assistance.

But the government doesn't want to come back to talk about injured workers on WSIB. The government doesn't want to come back to talk about job losses across the province and the plight of workers like those at Haun Drop Forge in Welland. The government doesn't want to come back next week to talk about kids and their moms who are having their child benefit clawed back by this government to the tune of \$250 million a year. The government doesn't want to come back to talk about making life a little fairer, a little more decent, a little kinder, for kids on social assistance. This government doesn't want to come back here to talk about improving the plight of recipients of ODSP pensions. This government is coming back to ram through its Bill 173, its Tom Parkinson-styled salary and severance package for MPPs here at Queen's Park.

You know, the scandal of the Tom Parkinson, Hydro One salary and severance package still shadows this government at Queen's Park. Notwithstanding that, the government demonstrates by its Bill 173 that the only thing it has learned from the Hydro One, Tom Parkinson's salary and severance scandal is how to do it for themselves.

I tell you, members in this Legislature talk about working hard. Do you know who works hard? Single moms with two and three jobs work hard. This government isn't improving their lot.

Do you know who works hard? The folks who walk through the plant gate down at Dofasco or Stelco in

Hamilton. Walk that catwalk one shift—I dare you—around the arc furnace. Walk it for one shift. Most members of this Legislature would be scurrying out of there so fast it would make your head spin.

Do you know who works hard? Child care workers taking care of people's kids, taking care of little kids, preparing them for better educations and better learning experiences than they would have without child care workers. They work hard.

Construction workers work hard, from 5 in the morning every morning, maybe 4:30, out there pouring concrete, working on the 25th, 35th, 45th floor of open construction whether the wind is blowing, whether it's minus 10, whether you've been up all night with a sick kid. They're up at 4:30 and 5 in the morning working hard.

People working underground in the mines of northern Ontario: Man, that's working hard.

MPPs figure they work hard just because they work long. But check the hands here. As I've had occasion to say over the course of the last few weeks, the most dangerous part of the job here is the occasional bruised ego or perhaps, on a bad day, a paper cut. How come a 21% salary increase alone, never mind the doubling up of the defined contribution pension payment by the government, never mind the attractive, Parkinsonian enhancements to the severance package, is important enough for the government to sit an extra week, but hard-working people out there don't warrant this government's attention? How come they don't warrant this government's attention?

Greed; self-serving self-interest. It's all about not being satisfied with being in the top 5% of income earners in this province. That's what MPPs are.

I say to the Liberals who voted for the Harris pension package, I say to the Conservatives who voted for the Harris pension package, were you wrong or were you simply mistaken or were you asleep at the switch or were you not doing your job or didn't you have the courage of your convictions then? I say that to those Liberals and those Conservatives who cheerleadered and pompommed the Harris pension plan proposal and who gave themselves a 10% salary increase when they blended the non-taxable portion of the MPPs' income with the taxable portion—a 10% salary increase in 1996. It's amazing that government members can show such disregard and disdain for people in this province who are hurting, but when it comes to serving themselves, they leap at the opportunity.

Mr. Tory was seen by many as a breath of fresh air—by many. I'm sorry to say that he has revealed himself—it's like Preston Manning in Stornoway. Remember, Speaker? Preston Manning in Stornoway. Mr. Tory has demonstrated that he's just like the rest of them. Mr. Tory has lost his virginity; he's no longer pristine. He was prepared to do some backroom wheeling and dealing. The Conservatives and the Liberals were conjoined for the sole purpose of breeding Bill 173 and giving birth to a Parkinsonian salary, severance and pension package for themselves.

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Look, do I begrudge anybody more money? Of course not. But I say it's a matter of priorities. Do you know what? If this Legislative Assembly could drop its partisan differences long enough to put the minimum wage up to \$10 this year; if it could make some meaningful adjustments to the ODSP and social assistance benefits right here and now, at least restore the 21.9% the Conservatives stole; and if the three political parties here could get their heads together and end the child benefit clawback to the tune of \$250 million a year from the poorest women and kids in this province, members of this assembly might be held in a little higher regard when they ram through, drive through, rush through, charge through—the incredible self-interest. You're going to see a bill that the government, along with the Tories, is going to try to package up, grease up, slide through in a way that you rarely see. They'd have wanted to do it in the dark of the night. They'd have wanted to do it in one fell swoop. They'd have wanted to do it without any debate. These folks are prepared to sit an extended week to serve themselves; they're not prepared to sit an extended week to serve others.

New Democrats won't be supporting this motion. New Democrats think that the priorities of this government, the Dalton McGuinty Liberals and the John Tory Conservatives—we think the priorities of Mr. McGuinty and Mr. Tory are skewed. We don't think they're the right priorities; we don't think they're the priorities that serve Ontarians well. If the Conservatives members and Liberal members want to play games about the issue, God bless; there's nothing New Democrats can do to stop them.

But we can and will speak up for those people who need speaking up for: kids; single moms working hard, who aren't getting a 21% or 31% pay/pension/severance increase this year—more often than not they're getting pink slips; retirees, senior citizens who are at risk of losing their homes because they can no longer afford the property taxes or the electricity bills or the natural gas bills, the heating costs; workers like those at Haun Drop Forge; young people, students, the children of those workers who lose their jobs, who are going to have to drop out of college and university and who will never fulfill the dreams that not just they had but that their parents and grandparents had, that they worked so hard to help them achieve—because the factory just shut down because electricity costs, amongst other things, are sky-high here in the province of Ontario.

New Democrats won't support this motion.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): This is a time to reflect on a year that is soon to pass into history, it's a time to resolve to do better where we can, to change what needs change and to offer thanks for what we have, for the friends and family we have, and for the hope and the promise and the opportunity that we have just for being Ontarians.

I have some thoughts on what the things that were done in this Legislative chamber mean in western Mississauga. It goes like this:

'Twas the time before Christmas, and all through Queen's Park

Not a member sat listless; the Chamber soon would be dark.

The foreign-trained were contented, Bill 124 had just passed;

Opposition relented, careers could continue at last.

And deep within Lisgar, there arose such a cheer

For the news that our GO station soon would be here.

The invited had connected, shiny shovels were found

And those who are elected showed up to break ground.

Commuters who stew idled when east they drive forth

Will find traffic unbridled on roads that lead north.

With spaces 900 at Lisgar to park

Fewer souls will be driving while outside it's dark.

And those patients who waited for the fourth MRI to appear

Had their hopes elevated when its delivery we moved ahead by a year.

"The government gets it," say patients and staff;

"Together it's progress, not cutting by half."

And there on the south block, where a parking lot lies

Work crews will soon gather, and cranes will then rise.

Credit Valley is world-class, its staff are the best;

"A" and "H" block will serve us throughout Mississauga West.

Young doctors we need, and to get their degree

At Credit Valley they practise while they attend U of T.

And Speaker, I rise in this chamber of laws

To greet all Ontarians, before Christmas we pause;

To wish to our friends and our neighbours alike

"Merry Christmas and to all, and to all a good night!"

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Just give me a quick calculation here about how much time I have, since we've divided it up equally amongst the three parties.

I do appreciate this opportunity to speak to the calendar motion, which is extending the legislative session for another week, until next Thursday. I think it's fair to say that there's a real possibility we'll be sitting through the New Year as well. Whether that's appropriate or inappropriate, who knows, but I think the fact that we have adequate time to debate legislation that still remains before the assembly is a good thing.

I know that some of the restrictions on time which we've seen in the past limit our opportunities to put all of our concerns—constituent concerns, critic concerns—on the record, so this extension gives us an opportunity. I know there are a number of members of our caucus who have petitions they still wish to table and others who have private members' legislation or resolutions and wish to have an opportunity to ask additional questions of the government. So in that sense, I think this is a positive

thing to be happening, because if you look at the Auditor General's report and all of the criticisms and red flags raised by the Auditor General, we have, as the official opposition, been trying to get some clear answers from the government with respect to how they are going to deal with these concerns. As is usually the case, we get non-answers from the government.

The Minister of Energy, Mr. Duncan, is perhaps the worst offender. My colleague Mr. Yakabuski from the Renfrew area has frequently raised the issue of the experts that they utilized to make a claim to the electorate in the last election that they were going to close all of the coal-fired generation in the province of Ontario by 2007. Of course, he said, "We had expert advice," whereas 2007 arrives and, "Well, we're going to extend it until 2009."

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Then, just recently, we heard that Ontario Power Generation indicated we wouldn't be able to close coal-fired generation down until 2014 at the earliest, which pretty much coincides with the promise the Progressive Conservatives made in the last election, which was a realistic and honest commitment—and I stress h-o-n-e-s-t—with respect to coal-fired generation.

We asked Mr. Duncan and we've asked Premier McGuinty on a number of occasions, "Tell us who these experts were, these people who told you that you could make that kind of a very significant promise to the people of Ontario in the last election campaign." Of course, they have refused, they have declined, despite a commitment made by the Minister of Energy during estimates at the committee process, where he committed to Mr. Yakabuski that he would supply that list of experts. I think we've all reached the conclusion that there were no experts, and if they did consult experts and were advised by experts, they were not experts in the energy field. They were experts in politics, people who came to them and said, "This can score you some points. This can win you some votes."

Who gives a damn if there's any truth or honesty attached to this? This might be a pretty significant factor for people in the province of Ontario who care about the environment and the damage that coal-fired generation is doing to our environment. But they didn't care about being honest or truthful or telling the facts. If they did, they'd reveal who these experts are. The fact that they have failed and refused to reveal the names of those so-called experts clearly indicates to anyone who cares about honesty and integrity in government that these people were not being truthful to the electors of Ontario.

Of course, we could refer to any number of promises and commitments made during the last election, over 50 of which have been broken in the going-on-four-years that the McGuinty government has been in office.

I think that having an extra week, two weeks or three weeks is good for us to be able to, once again, hammer home the point that honesty and integrity within the ranks across the floor are very much in question, very much in doubt, and the facts make that very, very clear.

A couple of things I want to touch on briefly: One of the pieces of legislation that I didn't have enough time to speak to was Bill 140, the long-term-care legislation, which is going to be travelling—the committee looking at that—the province in January. What amazes me about legislation like that being brought forward by the McGuinty government is the fact that there are no supporters of this initiative. I cannot find any supporters of this legislation, anyone who believes this is the right thing to do in terms of the long-term-care sector in the province of Ontario. I've had everyone appearing in my riding, from the non-profit sector, the for-profit, the municipally operated long-term-care facilities—everyone, to a person, is very, very concerned about this legislation and opposed to this legislation. I don't know. It's difficult to fathom, and this is just one example. But I know, from the concerns that I'm hearing, that—

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Bill 107, Bob.

Mr. Runciman: Bill 107's another example, the human rights legislation, where they spent over \$100,000 to advertise public hearings, had over 100 witnesses lined up to hear and then arbitrarily, after the Attorney General assured the committee that everyone would have an opportunity to be heard, shut the door, slammed the door on those people, and they lost their opportunity to be heard. They shoved it through.

Bill 140, getting back to long-term care—I think it's sort of thematic with this government because it's dominated by members of the Toronto establishment, if you will. It's Toronto-centric, and the people who represent small-town rural Ontario are relegated to the backbenches and are intimidated by those who sit in front of them apparently, because we see so much legislation coming before us that has negative impacts on small-town rural Ontario, yet these people do not stand up and defend those interests, the people they're supposed to be representing. They don't do it. If they do it, they do it behind closed doors in caucus and obviously have not been very effective. Certainly, Bill 140 is another very, very—I think—frightening example of that.

If you talk to people in small-town rural Ontario about the nursing home sector and what this legislation could mean to them—they feel it threatens their very future, their very existence. If you look at the licensing requirements and the compliance requirements that they're imposing on nursing homes without appropriate funding to meet those standards—and then they can come in with inspectors who say, "You're not in compliance with the standards that we imposed but didn't fund. We can pull your licence; we can put you in serious jeopardy." And there is no appeal from a compliance officer's order—no appeal whatsoever. So when these people want to improve their facilities, upgrade their facilities, when they go to a lending institution that looks at this kind of jeopardy these people are facing in terms of the viability and security attached to their operations, they're getting doors slammed in their face. This is the reality that these people simply do not want to accept.

If you look at my riding, Kemptville, for example, in the township of North Grenville: The nursing home there

has a \$2-million payroll, employs 100 people, pays taxes of \$160,000 a year—property tax. In Gananoque: 141 staff there at Carveth Care Centre, a wonderful facility. I have to point out that 95% of the employees are women. You can say that about virtually every nursing home in the province. The vast majority of employees and people earning their living in those facilities are women. Again, they're jeopardizing the futures of those individuals. Anyone who represents small-town rural Ontario knows how hard we've been hit over the past three years with the loss of manufacturing jobs in this province. What is it—60,000 so far this calendar year?

Mr. O'Toole: It's 140,000.

Mr. Runciman: It's a very significant number.

Mr. Hudak: It's 160,000 in two years.

Mr. Runciman: One hundred and sixty thousand in two years. I just had another plant close, in Prescott in my riding. We saw Domtar in Cornwall. We've seen a whole series of plant closures, a real erosion, a hollowing out of the manufacturing sector in Ontario, especially in small-town rural Ontario. What are they doing? We have employers like this who are serving real needs in our communities, providing meaningful employment to many, especially women in these communities, and they're putting their jobs in jeopardy, and further, potentially damaging the economy of so many small-town rural communities.

I appreciate the fact that I've had an opportunity to put a few more comments on the record with respect to Bill 140.

One quick comment that I want to make: Ms. Andrea Horwath, who's an NDP member from Hamilton East—I haven't had a chance to see the bill she tabled today, but I gather it deals with locked-in pension plans. I want to indicate my strong support for a change there. If you look at what's happening across Canada, I think there are four other provinces which have now loosened up the requirements on locked-in pension plans by making available at least up to, I think, 50% of those locked-in funds.

I was part of this place a number of years ago when we passed legislation which afforded members who saw their pensions rolled up—we were given the opportunity to freely move money out of locked-in accounts. That's wrong. There should not be an opportunity for members of the Legislature or other elected officials to have this kind of standard approach. I was part of that. I apologize for that, I want to see it corrected, and I will very strongly support Ms. Horwath. If the government moves quickly on this, they'll certainly have my strong support.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I, too, am looking forward to the opportunity to speak to the calendar motion, and I will be supporting it. I'm absolutely delighted to be able to stay here; hopefully it is till New Year's. What better way to celebrate, bringing in a new year in this House? I personally am looking forward to it. I know that the members who are sitting with me today can think of no better place they would rather be than right here. So I look forward to it.

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One of the things that this gives me is a wonderful opportunity to speak to—the member from Leeds-Grenville talked about rural small-town Ontario. I'm so glad that you remember us now that you're in opposition, but where were you when we needed you in rural Ontario? When you were in government, where were you? You talk about our voices. Where was your voice? I say to you, sir: You downloaded on rural Ontario; you ignored rural Ontario. You didn't even know where rural Ontario was. So I'm delighted that you now are thinking of us, because you did not, in government, think—not once—of rural small-town Ontario.

I wanted to have this opportunity to talk about all of the things happening in the riding of Huron-Bruce. I don't want to brag about it, but I do have to say that it is the most beautiful riding in the province. I just have to bring that out, because I know it's true and we must always be truthful.

I want to talk about the good work that is happening in the riding of Huron-Bruce. We've heard from members about the hardships that they are facing in their ridings, but I can tell you that I have never seen the sense of excitement that is happening in my riding: 1,500 new trade jobs, 500 new trade jobs—north, south. There is an excitement that I haven't seen in a very long time, and I don't have to look back very far to when the third party was in government and what our riding was going through at that time. And I have made comments on the previous government—

Mr. Leal: Four of them are still here.

Mrs. Mitchell: Four of them are still here and, I don't know, they must have been somewhere other than the cabinet meetings. What can I say? Posing, maybe.

Interjection.

Mrs. Mitchell: Some of them are still here. We remember.

But I do want to talk, just for the few minutes that I have been allocated, about what is happening.

When we see the energy—650 apprenticeship jobs are happening right now in the riding of Huron-Bruce. I can tell you that it has been a very long time since we have seen that volume. Think about that. One of the things that we have had a problem with in our rural communities is losing our young people. And 650 new apprenticeship program jobs available in the riding of Huron-Bruce, to me, are 650 young people who are going to stay in the riding of Huron-Bruce. They're going to choose to stay and to raise their children in their rural communities. That is what we need to grow strong rural communities, and that's what this represents.

A new ethanol plant: Not only will this help the agricultural community, but it will also clean up the air that we so desperately need.

There's so much good news and I only have such a short time. By golly, I could take all the time, and I know that that's not fair, because there are members clamouring to get up and talk. I know we're going to be here

to New Year's, so we're going to have lots of time to talk, but we have so much to say.

One of the things I want to talk about is health care in the riding of Huron-Bruce, the seven hospitals that we have in the riding of Huron-Bruce. We're proud of our seven hospitals. You talk to the nurses, you talk to our doctors, and you ask a very simple question, as the member from Durham always says. You ask this simple question: "Are things better today?" And what's the answer? What is the answer that we hear? "Things are better today," and they acknowledge that it is. And why is it? Because of the McGuinty government. We have made significant investment, and not only in certain areas. We have made it across this good province, and people do say that things are better today. To me, that is the test: Do people feel it?

Then we can talk about our health teams and what a difference they have made, especially in our rural communities. We don't have the accessibility to the large medical centres, and moving forward in a team approach makes such a difference in our rural communities.

Mr. Leal: It's all about small-town Ontario.

Mrs. Mitchell: That's right. We have nurse practitioners; we have psychologists. They're part of our family health teams. We have eight family health teams in the riding of Huron-Bruce.

Interjection.

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes, we do, and I know that those eight family health teams will go a long way in not only recruiting our new doctors but also in retention.

Mr. Leal: Did you say eight?

Mrs. Mitchell: Eight.

Mr. Leal: How many did you have three years ago?

Mrs. Mitchell: Zero. Zip. What we had at that time—I know the members want to hear a bit more, so I'll just take a little bit to talk about that. The community health centres that the previous government had set up never worked.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Why is that?

Mrs. Mitchell: Well, they never went and asked them, I can tell you that.

The other thing was chronic underfunding. For the nurse practitioner's position, it was laughable. They'd hire them, let them go, hire them, let them go, hire them, let them go. It was this constant strain on our community. The funding, the technology dollars and the facility dollars were never in place to make our community health centres go along. So now the family health teams have certainly been embraced.

Education: When you go into the schools now and talk to the students—I love to go in to talk to the students, because it's about our young people and their future.

Mr. Leal: They've got smiles on their faces—big smiles.

Mrs. Mitchell: Big smiles on their faces; the member from Peterborough knows. His wife is a teacher. He has a lot of opportunity to go into the schools, as we all do. What a difference. You walk into a school and you can

feel the difference. It's so much more positive. It really is.

Unfortunately, I do have to say that I have a few more things, but I know that I'm going to be here till New Year's, so I'm going to have lots of time to talk. I just want to wish the members the very best for Christmas, and I'll be able to wish that every day from now until the new year.

Mr. O'Toole: It's a pleasure, on these kinds of motions, government motion 277, a calendar motion which, as has been explained, is extending the amount of time for debate—but it's too little, too late, quite frankly, if you want to summarize it. On such important matters before the Legislature, this government seems to be walking away from any plan that I can see. The minister today introduced a finance bill. When it's done by a Liberal, you can expect that there will be a tax increase of some sort in it. This is the history, and it's the predictable outcome of those events.

I just want to put on the record the work that has been done by a lot of different people and that, in my view needs to be—

Interruption.

Mr. O'Toole: We need to make sure that we turn our phone off first.

That being done, I'm saying to you that the bills that I have particular—there's a few here that I think members should reflect on in the debate that occurs over the next week or two that I think will certainly serve the people of Ontario well, in a very generous way, I might say, in sort of a non-partisan way.

This one here is a private member's bill by Mr. Frank Klees from Oak Ridges. It's An Act to amend various Acts to require a declaration with respect to the donation of organs and tissue on death. The organ donation thing is a huge and often silent issue, but it could save lives. Mr. Klees has done so much work on this that I think it would be, in a non-partisan way, a gift, if you will—the gift of life itself, you might say—at this time of year. I think there could be unanimous consent for that particular bill, Bill 67. I would encourage all members to give it fair consideration in the debate—amongst the House leaders, primarily, who do this backroom business of giving time and giving voice to private members' work.

That being said, I remain hopeful and faithful, but I think there are a couple of bills—this may sound self-serving, but Bill 24 is a bill I've had on the books a couple of times, that's been introduced a couple of times. It's Bill 24, and it's regulating the spreading and storage of sewage sludge and biosolids on agricultural land. I've given that bill to Minister Broten and told her that I'm pleased to work with her to make sure that we protect the resource in agriculture, and that is the land that I'm talking of. This bill could easily be dealt with in a matter of a day or two.

1700

Bill 26 is another bill of mine that's been introduced. It's about decorum and respect within the Legislature.

Mr. Tory, our leader, has gone to great lengths to raise the bar, the personal responsibility of respect and accountability in the Legislature, and I'd like attention paid to Bill 26.

I'd say that Bill 32 is an act of mine that Minister Watson, in his health promotion ministry, could pay some—it declares, I believe, the first Monday in September to be physical fitness day.

Mr. Leal: That's Labour Day, isn't it?

Mr. O'Toole: That's right. It's the first school day, or whatever, after Labour Day. Mr. Leal is interrupting me, but it's a kind interruption, in respect to the previous comments I made.

It would just give them the opportunity to celebrate the importance of proactive personal responsibility in health care. You are what you eat, and a part of your lifestyle has consequences for your general health. Your activity level is so important. It's the easiest, simplest and most beneficial form of personal responsibility and, if you will, medication.

Mr. Leal: What about the cellphone bill?

Mr. O'Toole: We'll probably get to that. I have so many private members' bills over the 11 or 12 years I've been here that sometimes there isn't enough time to go through all those bills. Some of them have been successful. I've had a couple of bills that are actually now law in the province of Ontario. Irish heritage is celebrated, and I think a lot of people celebrated that. It wasn't an argument about northern and southern Ireland or a religious debate; the debate was about celebrating culture and heritage. All Canadians have a cultural heritage, and we should be proud of that and celebrate it. The minister is here and nodding her head respectfully as well.

I would like to think there are other members in this Legislature who would like to see their bills get some time and attention. There's some expertise on all sides of the House: the NDP private member's bill on locked-in retirement funds for seniors that was introduced today by Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East. We know, without seeing it yet—I have written to the minister several times on the issue of locked-in retirement funds. My belief is that the actuaries and those people who developed the models for disbursing the wealth spread out over time, often referred to as annuities—quite frankly, the life expectancy quotient in those actuarial models has changed. People aren't dying at 65 or 70. In many cases, people are living well into their 80s, like my mother-in-law, Madge Hall. I speak of her often; she's in a long-term-care facility. I visit her every weekend. She's probably home watching, because I made sure she had the parliamentary channel.

Mr. Leal: A lovely lady, Madge.

Mr. O'Toole: Jeff Leal says again, as he does every time, "A lovely lady," and she is. She's 88. So there's a case where they do live longer. Let's be clear: The cost for her in long-term care in the small community of Millbrook—it's a lovely, new long-term care, built under our government when Elizabeth Witmer was minister. Twenty thousand new long-term-care beds were built

under our command, if you will. It was an important part of the restructuring of health care.

The point I'm making here is that her cost per month is about \$2,000. That's \$24,000 a year. She has to have a little nest egg here. Her old age security and Canada pension pays part of that. So there's a copayment involved in health care, plus if she has podiatry work done or other kinds of things to take care of herself, my wife is very engaged in that personal care under the power-of-attorney issues. But we allow her—in fact, we encourage her—to take responsibility for her life and decisions, and we are there to support her.

When I think of those things and of some of the bills that are before us, like those mentioned by Mr. Runciman, Bill 140 is a bill that needs more time. The future of long-term-care facilities in this province under Bill 140 is a serious concern—if not now, it should be to members who are perhaps newer here. Of the four classes of long-term-care homes, classes B and C are in serious trouble. If they happen to close those beds, what's going to happen to the baby boomers? There's no plan. If I look at their commitments, Mr. McGuinty—and probably George Smitherman was involved in that policy—promised \$6,000 more per patient. We are entering the boom, bust and echo thing, and you're going to see huge and growing expenses that somehow the families are going to have to endure. There's a lot of work to be done on the long-term-care side.

I was looking at a bill by Frank Klee—again, a very effective member. Mr. Hudak has a number of bills that are quite important as well with respect to property assessment issues. These bills need the light of day and the debate we're being paid to be here for and respond to.

Bill 122, An Act to enhance safety on Ontario's roads and to empower police officers to shut down street racing: There have been young children's lives taken because there aren't the right tools in the hands of enforcement officers to deal with the issue. It's a very civil bill. I think that Minister Cansfield would be smart to embrace the bill with the openness that Premier McGuinty often speaks of. Often, actions speak louder than words. We should all take heart in that.

I do want to go on—I've only got a few minutes left. I suppose some people here might be a bit taken aback by me moving into a more seasonal commentary to talk about my family. Having a son who served our country, I want to say Merry Christmas or season's greetings—the appropriate greeting—to all persons serving Canada: the Canadian troops in Afghanistan or in other roles serving our country. I had a son who served, and I'm always proud to say I know a number of officers who were actually his classmates from military school and who are in Afghanistan. They've been in my home. They've been great company to know.

My wife is often saddened at this time of year—my wife, Peggy, was here yesterday, actually. The reason is simple. We have three daughters and two sons. My three daughters are all finished university, married and have relationships, but all three daughters are in different

countries. I have one in Australia—that's Rebecca—and her husband Dave is a test pilot. I'm very proud of those children. I like to think that Dave is actually my son. Anyway, they have two of our grandchildren, and I'd like to wish them a Merry Christmas. I'll send them a copy of Hansard—if I haven't sent them a Christmas card with a cheque in it, it would be even more troublesome. Dave and Rebecca's children, Meghan and Daniel, are lovely children. We did see them last summer, but we don't see them very often except on the webcam using Skype, which is a really good software tool that people should use if they're calling long distance. We do all the time.

The next daughter, Marnie, is a high school teacher in England. She's department head now, and she's expecting her first child. Marnie is a wonderful young person and she's expecting a child now—today—in London. I just talked to her before I came in here. We're really anxious, and quite frankly it's very personal when you express things in the Legislature like this. But I wish Marnie and Ben well, and I hope they are smart enough to call the child John.

Laughter.

Mr. O'Toole: That's an inside joke. Perhaps she would be unhappy if I didn't mention that.

My youngest daughter, Rochelle, and her partner, Jason, live on the Isle of Man. Rochelle is coming home next Monday for Christmas vacation.

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: Yes, the Isle of Man. He's a tax lawyer and that's why they're there. But now that the Legislature is sitting, I'm not going to be able to pick up my daughter, whom I haven't seen for some time.

I said to John Tory, compassionate leader that he is, that I may not be here on Monday. How's that? I have that commitment, as we all should to our families at this time of year.

All of us, when we look around our ridings, at the people we serve in a non-partisan way, extend season's greetings to them. I, like many members from rural Ontario, have been to at least four, perhaps five, Santa Claus parades. The volunteers who put these things together to celebrate the joy of the winter season, if you will, or the Christmas season or just the joy for children—it's an important contribution to our communities and the vibrance and quality of life.

1710

In that regard, I have to thank a few people, specifically Val McCormick. They had the 45th anniversary of their parade this year. These volunteers work almost year-round, not unlike the Toronto parade. There were many, many people.

There are a lot of volunteers I'd like to thank. Another person, Brian Hammond, took the time to drive me in that parade. I thank Brian. I see him on occasion. He's a nice young fellow, an executive with a company, and he took the time out.

Another was the Scugog, in Port Perry. It's a wonderful evening parade. The chamber of commerce does all the work there. Craig Traylor is the organizer, along with

a group of volunteers. Jim Conlin, a successful young business person, was my driver in that parade.

In Newcastle, we also had an evening parade. I think it's the second anniversary of their parade. They did a wonderful job. The committee there, I think, was Mark Hendrikx, Karen Bastas and Joan Kimball. They had a marvellous night and a marvellous parade.

I just want to extend to my constituents, and to other members here from all parties, season's greetings and Merry Christmas—making sure that, in the time we spend here, the tone we try to set is more co-operative, more collegial and more productive for the people we serve.

When you're speaking to a calendar motion or other motions—perhaps the specific difficulties around the MPP pay issue—I want to compliment Premier McGuinty in his responses today in showing respect for public service. It's in that tone that he and Mr. Tory—and I would hope Mr. Hampton—would take some time to understand the respect that is required here to make sure that people have the tools and resources to have a productive life in their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity, and best wishes.

Ms. Horwath: No matter what happens around this place—it has been about two and a half years that I've been here; I guess at the end of May it will be three years—it's interesting, because there's always something new. For me, the new thing is a calendar motion. I don't think I've ever had occasion to vote on or debate a motion that talks about the schedule, more or less. Maybe it has come up and I haven't been on House duty, or whatever, but this is my first opportunity to debate that kind of motion.

As I was listening to the different speeches of the various members here this afternoon, it struck me that it's similar to when we deal with budget bills, because members pretty much have some latitude. I'm sure that if that's not the case, Mr. Speaker, then, as the effective and studious Speaker you are, you will let me know if I'm wandering off track. But it seems to me that the discussion that's been happening this afternoon has been fairly far-reaching, fairly broad, fairly expansive in terms of topics that members have been able to cover. I see that the Speaker is looking at the standing orders. I hope he's not taking this as a challenge to clip my wings in terms of what I'm going to be saying this afternoon. I don't think that's the case because, being one of the final speakers this afternoon, I'm hoping I'll be able to raise some issues that are important from my perspective.

When I first got here, I had the privilege, actually, of participating in the House leaders' meetings; I was given that opportunity. I must say that I really did appreciate that. I think it gave me insights that a lot of members aren't able to obtain, not having had that experience. It's very enlightening to watch and pay attention to the way the various House leaders to and fro around who places priority on what piece of business that goes on here. Of course, not all of that is about bills, and not all of it is

about government bills. Some of it is about private members' bills, and many other things come into the fray of that discussion. It's interesting because, although at the end of the day the people who watch the legislative channel see various bills called and various items come up for discussion and debate, all of that stuff is taken care of at the House leaders' meetings. Interestingly enough, there has been quite a bit of give and take over the last little while around what this House has had the opportunity to deal with, both, as I said, in regard to bills as well as other business. Of course, one of the things that is happening today is the extension of the time frame for us to be able to sit into next week. Funny enough, it seems to come up—again, I guess this would be my second Christmas experience here.

Mr. Kormos: Ho, ho, ho.

Ms. Horwath: Ho, ho, ho. Last year, I can remember—has it been my third? It would have been my third, right? That's 2004, 2005—so it's my third. Both other times there was this anticipation—kind of like kids on Christmas morning—that we're going to finish early, we're not going to be here right up until Christmas Eve. The first year I was here—of course, it was all new and you're learning, and it's pretty interesting in terms of the—

Interjection.

Ms. Horwath: My friend from Niagara Centre mocks and says it's no heavy lifting here. But I've got to tell you, mentally it's a big learning curve. If you're doing the work and you're paying attention and you're trying to figure out what's going on here, it can be draining, at least from a mental perspective. So that first year I was looking forward to it. I'm thinking, "Okay, I'm tired." I had to get into the swing of not being with my family every night and all of the adjustments, for most members who aren't from the Toronto area, that come around the lifestyle changes that take place and the learning curve. So I was really excited when I figured it would give me a couple of days at least to go back home and start dealing with these Christmas issues. Then my House leader came in and said, "We'll sit here until New Year's Eve if we have to sit here till New Year's Eve to get things done around here." I thought, what a wet blanket that is to somebody who is a little bit tired and really looking forward to taking a few days in between before it got into the heavy-duty holiday season.

Having said that, I have now learned that there is no such thing as leaving a little bit early around this place when it comes to the end of the season. That is because, notwithstanding some of the remarks made earlier today, it's not all roses and it's not all pleasantries when it comes to House leaders and their discussions and their decisions around what comes and doesn't come into our agenda for debate.

So in that vein, I have to say that although we are going to be sitting next week, we're going to be sitting next week to debate something that I think could be taking a second place or the back seat to other issues.

Excuse me while I pick up what I dropped. I was trained to always pick up what you drop. So there you go,

Mom, I picked it up as soon as I dropped it. It didn't lay on the floor for another week.

So the issue is that there are many other items, certainly from my perspective—even government bills—that I would rather be sinking my teeth into right now, not to mention some of the private members' bills even that I have on the order paper that I think we could be spending some good time on next week. I know for a fact, or I suspect strongly, notwithstanding what other members have said, that these other issues are not going to be coming up, that in fact there is only one sole reason for us to meet next week, and that is to deal with Bill 173, which the government tabled yesterday, around the increases.

I have to tell you, though, I would even prefer that we deal with a bill that was introduced just about two weeks ago, Bill 165, which is about making the child advocate independent. Now, if we had brought that bill forward and taken it through the process, I would have happily sat here and not seen any conflict in my own mind around the prioritization of the government and what needs to be done in the province of Ontario, because the independence of the child advocate is long overdue. So passing strange how something that was promised back in 2003, re-promised back in 2005 and re-promised again at the beginning of this year—finally we have the bill. But, of course, we just have the bill. We have to go through second reading, we have to go through committee public hearings and clause-by-clause, and we have to go through third reading. All of those things take time. So I would say we'll be lucky if we actually end up with an independent child advocate by the end of this government's term, specifically because they're pushing it to the bottom of the pile in terms of priority. They've been doing that all along, and they're continuing to do that. It sits on the bottom of the pile with other issues that are of significant concern to New Democrats, and that includes the issues raised by my friend from Niagara Centre around job losses in this province. In fact, members of the Conservative caucus have also raised in this current debate the issue of job losses in the province of Ontario.

1720

I come from Hamilton. We have seen significant job losses in our city. It's extremely difficult for families to make ends meet and extremely difficult for families to go through this very season. I think the member from Niagara Centre was very correct when he indicated that the stresses on families who have lost their jobs, at this time of year specifically, are horrible. It leads to all kinds of personal tragedies that I think we need to acknowledge, and we need to, therefore, redouble our efforts to deal with issues like the reduction of jobs in our economy and economic stagnation, at least in the manufacturing sector. It's a significant problem in the city I come from.

But do you know what? There are a couple of other issues that I think we should be putting on the record that need to be addressed. Again, the member from Niagara Centre raised the issue of injured workers. Just last week, we were out in front of the Ministry of Labour offices

urging the minister not only to deal with the indexation of workers' compensation pensions for injured workers but also to acknowledge and recognize the fact that 35% of workers in this province are not covered by WSIB. They can go to work and get injured—and many of those are in the financial and insurance sectors, quite frankly, which everyone knows do have injuries, particularly repetitive strain injuries, for example. Nonetheless, there are workplace-related injuries that go on in those sectors. Private schools and the insurance and banking industries particularly: Those industries can well afford to pay into the workers' compensation system so that when their workers are injured on the job, they can, at the very least, have some kind of income replacement because, through no fault of their own, they were injured on the job. So that's one.

Another one that I think we should be dealing with, quite frankly, is the clawback of the national child benefit. That's something the government could have and should have been doing. We could be spending some real effort on making that happen. There's the special diet. The fact that they have changed the special diet forms that now restrict the ability of people who are on ODSP and Ontario Works, who need a special diet to maintain their health and keep them well, people who are diabetic, people who have conditions, for example, like ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease—we were able to take some action on that one small piece. But there are many, many others who are having significant reductions in their well-being, who are having significant negative health effects because this government refuses to acknowledge that their new special diet regime has become extremely punitive and causes significant health problems for people.

The other one I thought was important to raise—and there are really so many. But the whole reality—and I'm going back to the beginning again in terms of raising issues—is that this government still refuses to invest the dollars they said they were going to invest in our child care sector. That's a problem. That \$300 million would go a long way on an annual basis to create more child care spaces, and of course that would enable families and parents to be able to get good-quality, regulated developmental child care for their kids. I know that many, many parents in the province of Ontario need and want that.

I believe I'm supposed to be leaving a few minutes at the end of my speech. So, on that point, I'm thankful to have had an opportunity to speak to these issues because I really believe that when it comes to the salaries, the pay increases and the pay raises that this government would rather talk about, as a New Democrat I believe that these other issues are much more important.

Mr. Ramal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in support of this motion. It's very important to be here to do the business that's needed to serve the people of Ontario.

When I got elected in 2003, I had one assumption: We're here to serve. The time and the location don't matter. Whenever the opportunity is open for serving people, we should be there to serve. That's why I'm sup-

porting this motion to extend the time in the House: to serve the people of Ontario, to deal with some issues concerning the people of Ontario, to deal with some bills that are still not finished yet, because it's very important to pass those bills, very important to deal with a lot of issues, because people trusted us when they elected us to do this job for them.

I'm honoured and privileged to be a part of the government. I think all the time about the people of Ontario. When I go to my riding of London—Fanshawe, people ask me all the time, "What happened?" I attend many functions, and people ask me, "What happened today at Queen's Park? What kinds of bills did you guys pass? What kinds of issues are going on there?" I talk all the time about education, how much we work with the educators in the province of Ontario. I'm happy and honoured and privileged when I go to schools. I see the happiness, I see the teachers working very hard. The teachers smile when they see me. They think we have the best government ever, we have the best Minister of Education ever working with them, creating peace and tranquility, which we never had before. You see now, in the education system, the teachers, the boards and the parents working together to make sure we have a good education system in Ontario.

When I drive down on the highway from here to London, I see a lot of construction: bridges being built, the highway being expanded. All the people are happy because they can have a safe road. They have the ability to move their goods from one city to another city. It's very important for all of us.

Last summer, when we visited the farming community with the honourable member John Wilkinson, we had the chance to meet the farmers; we had the chance to visit many farmers in the province of Ontario. We had a chance to meet with them one-on-one, to visit their farm and listen to them. I felt we have a great community and we have great people talking to you because they think, and they believe strongly, they have a government in Ontario that listens to them and listens to their concern and tries to work with them to ensure that every one of them has a good life and a good future.

When you visit the hospitals, you see also the relaxation; you see people happy. I know it's not fixed all the way. We're trying to establish a mechanism to work with health care people who work on the front line to serve the people of Ontario. We see them all the time. We also visit many different long-term-care homes in the province of Ontario. You see our progress there. We're still working with those sections, with those elements of our society on a daily basis to make sure everyone in Ontario is being served well by this government.

We pass many different bills in this House. Lately, we had a great bill, Bill 124, fair access to regulating bodies. I had a chance to work as PA with the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Minister Mike Colle, who worked very hard since we started consultation on this bill to visit many different communities across the province of Ontario, to talk to many different regulating

bodies, to talk to many different stakeholders, to talk to many different foreign-trained skilled workers, and he listened to them. The minister's staff worked very hard to establish a bill to serve their concerns, to look after them, because we believe strongly that everyone in the province of Ontario should be able to use his or her skills to serve himself or herself, their family and the people of Ontario. That's why we passed that bill yesterday.

Today we passed another bill—what did we call the bill today?—the public service act, and also to regulate or reform so many different parts of the government, from real estate departments to bankers to bereavement homes to cemeteries to gift cards. So many different concerns, so many different elements were in this bill to help people to be served very well because, as you know, many different laws and regulations had been established a long time ago. Times have changed; technology changed; modern life changed; situations changed; the population changed. Therefore, it's time to change some of those bills, to reform those bills. That's why I think this extension gives us some chance to deal with more bills to help the people of Ontario.

1730

The member for Peterborough—he's a great member. He represents his constituents very well; and also the member for Huron-Bruce, who spoke before me about the importance of being in this place, even if we're going to stay until Christmas in order to serve the people of Ontario. Also, the member from London North Centre, who worked together most of the time to visit many communities to work on different issues, from health care to education to colleges to universities to hospitals to long-term homes and all the stuff that's important to us.

That's why we call ourselves the London team. We have on our team the Minister of Labour, Steve Peters. We have also on our team the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Chris Bentley, and we have the member for London North Centre, Deb Matthews, who worked very hard on different fronts. This team has worked very hard on different fronts. Especially lately, they're working especially hard on the poverty line. They're trying to solve and trying to address the poverty issue in the province of Ontario, especially—she's a part of the women's caucus: the member from—

Interjection.

Mr. Ramal: No, no. Maria Van Bommel, the member for—

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Huron-Bruce.

Mr. Ramal: No, not Huron-Bruce. What's the—

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): Lambton.

Mr. Ramal: Lambton. Yes.

Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture): Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Mr. Ramal: Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. Thank you, Minister, for correcting me.

She is the head of the women's caucus and works very hard. Most of the time we have the privilege of visiting

that women's caucus, that deals with a lot of issues. As I mentioned today, yesterday and the day before, they've been dealing with the poverty issue. They've been listening to many different stakeholders.

We have a vibrant caucus. We have vibrant members in the caucus who, all the time, are trying to tackle all of the issues, without any fears. That's why we are here today to serve, and we are privileged to continue working next week in order to deal with all the issues, with passion, ability and an open mind to solve them all.

I believe it's our privilege. The people of Ontario give us a chance to be here to be able to serve them and be able to represent them. That's why I came: to be part of this government, to be elected in 2003, to be the advocate of the people of London-Fanshawe, to listen to them and to consult them every single time we have an issue and when we have a critical time.

Mr. Leal: What about Bill 124?

Mr. Ramal: Bill 124 was a very strong bill. It's a very positive step forward. A very important element of our society is going to benefit from that bill, especially the newcomers who come with education: doctors, professors, engineers, nurses—all of the people who come to Ontario who want to be full citizens. They want to utilize their ability to serve the great community of Ontario. That's why the government came with that bill: to serve them and to give them the chance to be strong participants in this community.

I think we're on the right track—also in the right directions—in order to serve the people of Ontario.

Mr. McMeekin: Right track, right direction.

Mr. Ramal: Right track and right directions. I believe that most of the time when we have debate in the House, we listen to the opposition. The opposition come with good ideas sometimes, and we work with them because we have an open mind. Personally, myself, I like to have the dialogue open all of the time, because the only way we'll have the ability to serve the people of Ontario is when we work together as a team. All of the elected members of this House—it's the only way we can proceed.

In the end, I want to wish all of my constituents in London a Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year. Hopefully, I'll be able to speak with them and to them before that time. If I don't get the chance, I wish them happy holidays and a great season.

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr. Berardinetti: Southwest, but it's close to Centre.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry, sir. My apologies.

Mr. Berardinetti: I'm right beside the Honourable Speaker's riding. We share a common boundary. In just a couple of minutes, I wanted to say—

Interjection: You should invite him over once in a while.

Mr. Berardinetti: I do invite him over once in a while. He invites me over as well.

Just in a few moments, the motion before us today is straightforward: that we shall continue to meet until Thursday, December 21. I have no problem with doing that. I think there are a number of important pieces of legislation in front of us that we need to deal with, and I'm happy to sit and debate those issues.

I think back and I look back at how far we've come in these past three years, the amount of legislation we've put through and our commitments on health care, education and so many other areas where we've made improvements and still need to make more improvements, because the job is not done yet. We are still working on that, and that's been made clear through the Premier and through members of the cabinet in their various announcements.

I just wanted to say that I'm proud to be part of the government, proud to be able to sit next week and debate the necessary bills. Earlier on, the member from Niagara Centre, Mr. Kormos, talked about workers and their conditions. I think about my own father, who's sitting at home right now with about 65% of his hearing gone because of the working conditions in the wood mill that he worked at and the 10- or 12-hour workdays six days a week. I grew up without a father because he was always at the lumberyard, trying to earn minimum wage. So I well know and understand and can appreciate the dangers of that kind of work, that kind of heavy labour, and the toll it takes on a body. When that body reaches 70 or 75 years old, it seems like a 90-year-old body.

We've done a lot to try to improve things. It's not a perfect world; we're trying to make it better. I'm happy to sit here and say hello to constituents. I know that my father right now sits at home and watches with his nephew, Matthew, my brother's son, and Katharine, Lia and Amanda. They all sit together and they watch when they get the chance. My father knows that he tried to make something better for us, and we in turn will try to make it better for the next generation, for our children, when that day comes.

So I'm happy to sit till the 21st and, if need be, beyond that, and to come back early if we need to, because I'm here to work and to represent the constituents of Scarborough Southwest.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): C'est avec plaisir que j'ai la chance de participer à ce débat, parce que c'est un débat, je pense, qui est important pour beaucoup de monde, non seulement ici à l'Assemblée certainement, mais aussi dans les comtés qu'on représente.

Premièrement, ce débat aujourd'hui fait affaire avec une motion pour que l'Assemblée revienne au travail la semaine prochaine, du lundi au jeudi. Ce travail va être pour avoir un débat pour donner une augmentation de salaire aux députés provinciaux ici à l'Assemblée.

Je veux être très clair, comme j'ai dit aux médias aujourd'hui. Est-ce que les députés veulent toujours avoir plus? Oui. Est-ce que le monde travaille fort? Bien oui; il n'y a pas de question. Mais je pense que le point est qu'il y a beaucoup de monde dans cette province qui ont besoin de l'aide et de l'assistance du gouvernement

provincial. C'est pas mal difficile pour ce monde-là d'accepter que les députés vont avoir une augmentation de salaire de 20 % ou 25 % quand on a du monde dans des communautés à travers l'Ontario qui ont perdu leurs emplois.

Je regarde le monde dans mon comté—à Opasatika, à Hearst, à Timmins, à Smooth Rock Falls, certainement, et à d'autres places—qui ont perdu leurs emplois. Comme leur député, je pense que je leur dois au moins l'opportunité de parler de leur part dans ce débat pour que le monde ici à l'Assemblée sache qu'ils ont eu beaucoup de difficultés et qu'ils ont perdu leurs emplois.

Si les députés disent, « Écoutez, on va tous, dans le noir, sortir de l'Assemblée un jeudi soir et accepter un projet de loi » —comme on dit en anglais, « Nod, nod, wink, wink »—je ne pense pas que ça va aller très bien avec le monde que je représente.

Je regarde ma collègue M^{me} Cheri DiNovo, qui a introduit pour nous un projet de loi qui est très important sur la question du salaire minimum. On a tous dans nos comtés à travers l'Ontario du monde qui travaillent fort au salaire minimum et qui veulent avoir la chance d'espérer avoir certaines affaires que nous prenons pour acquis : acheter des bebelles pour leurs enfants dans le temps de Noël, acheter un peu d'extra sur l'épicerie à la fin de la semaine et avoir un loyer qui fait du bon sens. C'est pas mal difficile quand tu travailles pour un salaire minimum. De la part des néo-démocrates, notre députée M^{me} DiNovo a introduit un projet de loi qui dit, « On doit élever ce salaire minimum à 10 \$ l'heure. »

1740

En regardant ce monde-là, je pense qu'on doit au moins avoir la chance d'avoir un débat dans cette Assemblée pour dire au gouvernement que c'est toute une affaire d'essayer d'aider les députés. Oui, les députés travaillent fort. Les députés aimeraient avoir plus d'argent. Mais il y a beaucoup de monde dans cette province, tel que le monde sur le salaire minimum, tel que les travailleurs qui ont été congédiés ou qui ont perdu leurs emplois, et d'autres personnes qui ont besoin de l'assistance du gouvernement provincial.

Quand on voit un gouvernement, tel que celui de M. McGuinty, introduire un projet de loi sans regarder les besoins des autres personnes dans la province, je pense que c'est difficile.

On va avoir de la chance. Le gouvernement a décidé d'avoir ce débat la semaine prochaine. On va être ici. On va participer à ce débat et on va s'assurer que les voix du monde de nos comtés sont entendues et que le monde comprend bien que, dans la province de l'Ontario, il y a certaines personnes, telles que les députés, qui vont faire très bien cette année. Mais il y a beaucoup de monde dans nos comtés qui ont des misères sérieuses quand ça vient à leur situation financière. Ils demandent à travers nous, les néo-démocrates, et autres s'ils veulent se joindre à nous dans ce débat, de faire quelque chose pour avancer les dossiers qui sont importants pour le monde dans notre province.

Je finis le débat en disant que le gouvernement aurait pu décider de faire ça différemment. D'habitude, il y a un

accord entre les trois partis concernant la manière dont on va avancer les salaires ou les bénéfices des députés. C'est un peu triste que M. McGuinty n'ait pas été capable de faire ça pour des raisons—ce n'est pas totalement de sa faute, mais c'est de sa faute certainement. J'aimerais beaucoup mieux avoir une situation où on aurait pu accepter quelque chose à l'unanimité.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth—Middlesex): I am also delighted to be joining in the debate this afternoon. The question in front of us is whether or not we're all going to agree—or most of us, anyway—to sit next week. I want you to know that I agree. I believe we should sit next week because there are many important pieces of legislation that are still on the order book and they need to be dealt with.

There may be some members opposite who are going to vote against this. They don't think we should be here next week, and I would say that that is in character. I know the member from Niagara—left-of-centre brought up some concern as to those people who are hard-working and about whether or not there's some justice in the world. I think about who has to work at night. You know who has to work at night? People who work on shift work have to work at night. They really don't have any choice. They may have a collective agreement, they may not have a collective agreement, but many of them work at night.

I know that our bravest public servants—not us—work at night. Our nurses and doctors, paramedics, firefighters, police officers and corrections officers work at night. But do you know who doesn't want to work at night? Since this session began, there have been 76 votes in this Legislature about sitting for evenings. I want to tell the good people back home that the days here are Monday to Thursday, and in this place we start at 1:30 in the afternoon. On Thursdays, we come in at 10, but from Monday to Thursday, when we're sitting, we work in the Legislature starting at 1:30.

Seventy-six times the question has been asked, "Are you prepared to sit at night, from 6:45 to 9:30?" and 76 times in a row, since the beginning of this session, just since the last throne speech—we're not going back to 2003, just this year—every member of the third party stood in their place and said, "Nope. I'm not working tonight." If it was up to me, I would work. I know all the members of the government caucus said we're prepared to work at night. I know that many members of the official opposition said, "Yes. Given what we're remunerated, we're going to work tonight. We think that's right. There's important public work that has to be done." But consistently, 76 times in a row, just in the last year or so, the members of the third party said no.

So it's no surprise to me. When we say, "We really should work next week in this House," who's opposed to it? Well, we're going to find out, because in this House you've got to stand in your place and vote. When you stand in your place and vote, you tell your constituents back home if you're for something or you're against something.

But there's one bill in front of our House right now, Bill 173, that goes a step further, because it doesn't just require you to vote and say that you're opposed to something. You then have to, if you feel so compelled, make an election. I think that that will be very, very instructive for all the good people of Ontario, that there may be people who will stand on one side and say that they're opposed to Bill 173, and then the question their constituents will ask is, "What did you do about the election? Within that 60-day period of time, what did you decide?"

I know some of us are very comfortable with that, because we feel that the Integrity Commissioner—the man in this province who has, without doubt, integrity; it's right in his job description—the Honourable Justice Coulter Osborne, has given all of us some sage advice. Some of us in this House will take it; others will not. But all of us will be held to account as to whether we voted for or against the bill. All of us will be held to account as to whether we decided to elect or not to elect. I think that was very wise of the government to do so.

I think it's wise that this issue is before the House now, not at some nefarious future date, where people can say one thing now and say something else later on. I'll give you an example of that. I distinctly remember the previous government stating that there was no deficit in the final year of their government, and then the Provincial Auditor discovered some \$5.5 billion worth of debt.

I distinctly remember a former colleague of ours who's now the federal Minister of Finance, Mr. Flaherty, backing up Prime Minister Harper, who said on the campaign trail, "I'm not going to tax income trusts. No, not me." Then on Halloween—boo—he decided to do it. I want you to know, and I'll put on the record, that I agree with Mr. Flaherty. Times had changed. Companies were structuring their affairs so that they would not retain earnings, so that they would not grow, and they did it so they could avoid paying tax. I think Mr. Flaherty had a very difficult decision. He said that he didn't like making it, but he had to make it. It reminds me of my friend the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Greg Sorbara, who was faced with a different set of facts: some \$5.5 billion worth of hidden deficit. He too had to make a very difficult choice. That's what we do here. Many, many times we have to make difficult choices.

But there have been some wonderful choices made in this session. I want to commend my good friend the member from London—Fanshawe, who's the parliamentary assistant to the Honourable Mike Colle, our Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Khalil Ramal and his wife, Nisrine, are a wonderful but typical tale in the province of Ontario of people who are newcomers. Mr. Ramal and his wife, who is a medical doctor, for me personify what it is to come to this province. They will tell you the stories about how this is a wonderful country and a wonderful province, but it hasn't always been welcoming to all newcomers.

Our history in this province is filled with the history of the newcomer. Today I know was a particularly proud

day for my friend Khalil Ramal. At a reception that was held with the newcomer communities across Ontario to celebrate the passage last night—I want to say to all members in the government and opposite that it's one of those times when we all came together. We all agreed that Bill 124 should be passed. There was no opposition last night. I didn't hear a lot of debate last night. There seemed to be perhaps some people who decided to be quiet about it. But the most important thing is that historic piece of legislation, which I think is going to set a standard for all provinces and our federal government about the fact that if you come to Canada, you're welcome. We don't just say that we're going to roll out the welcome mat, we actually do something about it. We actually make sure that you have fair access to the profession that you have learned in your country of origin and those skills and those talents that you've brought to this wonderful province.

I know next week as well will be difficult. My good friend from Durham was saying that on Monday night he has his daughter coming in from England. My daughter Alexandra is in first year at Western. She was counting on her daddy to come and pick her up on Tuesday. I had to tell her this afternoon that I'm not going to be able to do that. All of us are going to have to make some sacrifices, but we have important work to do. We are valued by the public for the work we do—not at all times, but at the end of the day, they know that democracy is better than the alternative: no democracy. That's why we're here, and we take that very, very seriously. So if it means that we need to sit next week to move through important pieces of legislation like Bill 130, which is going to reform the Municipal Act, I think it's very important that we're here to do that.

I want to say particularly to my constituents that I, like other members, wish everyone in our constituencies the best of the season. I say in a non-partisan fashion that I extend that to all the members in this chamber. I look forward to standing in my place and voting and subsequently electing on Bill 173.

The Acting Speaker: The time for debate is now concluded, it being 10 minutes to 6.

In accordance with the motion agreed to earlier today, Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 277. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I heard some noes.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

There being five members, call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1751 to 1801.

The Acting Speaker: Would all those who are in favour please rise and be counted by the Clerk.

Ayes

Amott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Phillips, Gerry
Arthurs, Wayne	Kular, Kuldip	Qaadri, Shafiq
Balkissoon, Bas	Leal, Jeff	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Levac, Dave	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	MacLeod, Lisa	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Marsales, Judy	Runciman, Robert W.
Bryant, Michael	Martiniuk, Gerry	Ruprecht, Tony
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Sergio, Mario
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Smith, Monique
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Smitherman, George
Di Cocco, Caroline	Miller, Norm	Van Bommel, Maria
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Fonseca, Peter	Munro, Julia	Wilkinson, John
Gerretsen, John	O'Toole, John	Zimmer, David
Hoy, Pat	Patten, Richard	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will please stand and be recorded by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Marchese, Rosario
DiNovo, Cheri	Kormos, Peter	Martel, Shelley

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 47; the nays are 6.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The time now being after 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1803.

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(Hansard)****Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 14 December 2006

Jeudi 14 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. BrownPrésident
L'honorable Michael A. BrownClerk
Claude L. DesRosiersGreffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 14 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 14 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

CO-OPERATIVES

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should commit to the promotion, development and support of the co-operative model of business as one that should be replicated to provide stronger communities, increased social responsibility and continued economic growth, and that the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade commit to investigating the establishment of a co-operative secretariat to support the co-operative model of business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. McMeekin has moved private member's notice of motion number 33.

Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. McMeekin, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. McMeekin: I want to begin by sharing a bit of how I came to this place and this resolution today. I grew up on Hamilton Mountain, and not a lot of farming occurred in the area of West 16th Street. When my wife set up a medical practice out in Flamborough, I of course went with her and, as fate would have it, became the mayor of the good town of Flamborough and was introduced to a whole new way of life, largely agricultural.

I once offered one of my new-found friends in Flamborough some time to help him bring in his crop, and he, knowing my experience and expertise, was wise enough to say, "No, thanks." In any event, I discovered quickly that if one owes constituents nothing else, you certainly owe them the requirement that you listen, learn and then act, based on what you have heard and learned. I can attest that there's much in the agricultural, rural community that people who are involved in agricultural industries for a living can teach, and certainly much that this representative has learned and continues to need to learn. Farmers are wonderful mentors and instructors, not only about their industry but about life and about how to make your way through the world.

I discovered fairly quickly that we have much in common: a belief in hard work and in fairness, a passion for community and the need to celebrate our successes while

we share one another's burdens. I discovered, too, the importance of agricultural education. In fact, I carry around in the trunk of my car the curriculum developed by the OMAFRA group, and any time I get a chance to visit a school, I try to inflict the curriculum material on those who have a responsibility to educate our young people.

I discovered that farmers not only feed cities, they nurture minds with their creative, entrepreneurial ways. I have also discovered from experience that innovative ideas and innovative agricultural industries don't just happen; they require careful thought and can be best tackled together.

I want to quote from a letter from the local federation of agriculture in Hamilton-Wentworth. This was addressed to me: "Local farmers are looking to our political leaders to work together with us to develop conditions that will attract investment and create a favourable economic setting in rural Ontario. In order to sustain vibrant communities and a vibrant agricultural industry, we want and need you to consider the benefits and the damage that your decisions can create for the Ontario farmer and rural communities when setting policies, developing programs and making decisions."

Today more than ever, those who are going to succeed in our rapidly changing global economy are those who are prepared to ask three questions: "Why?" "What if?" and "Why not?" No approach, from my experience, is more helpful in this regard than the co-operative association model of economic development.

Co-operatives are characterized by voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member participation, both financially and in terms of time commitment; autonomy and independence; an orientation toward education, training and information-sharing; a willingness to co-operate and to network in the interest of the common good; and, of course, most importantly, a real concern for community.

In Ontario, co-operatives are everywhere. They're in the agri-food sector, the finance sector, health care sector, housing, elder care, energy—like Positive Power, a local award-winning co-operative in my beloved Flamborough with which I have some connection; child care and elsewhere.

The co-op sector itself is enormous. There are some 2.3 million Ontarians who are members of a co-operative. There are some 1,900 co-operatives in Ontario, second only to Quebec, and these co-operatives control over \$19 billion in assets in Ontario and over \$100 bil-

lion nationwide. In Ontario, there are over 9,000 persons who are employed directly through co-operatives.

Examples of successful co-ops include the CUMIS Group, insurance; the Co-operators Group, the largest Canadian-owned multi-product insurance company, with assets in excess of \$6 billion; Gay Lea Foods, a leader in the dairy industry in Ontario and Canada; GROWMARK Inc.; the co-operative housing federation of Canada—and the list goes on and on.

Ontario farmers are and have always been at the forefront of the “new generation” co-operative movement. The goal is simple, as espoused quite articulately by the Christian Farmers and others, and that is to find ways to attempt to retain ownership and control of their products beyond the farm gate and to invest in ventures that bring added value to those products. The model offers farmers the opportunity to join together to move up the value chain and to capture additional value-added profits from the processing, packaging, marketing and shipping of their agricultural products.

1010

Ethanol is a good example—some of the ethanol co-operatives that have evolved. I’ve discovered recently from doing some research that there’s actually a fuel out there called E-85 that burns 85% ethanol and only 15% gas. Can you imagine a day not too far away when we’ll be growing all of our fuel? That’s an exciting prospect. It occurs to me that with the hybrid cars and the flex-fuel vehicles that will be needed for this E-85 gas, the co-operative secretariat that I’m proposing today could very well, in the context of policy initiatives, look at perhaps granting tax credits to those who want to invest in building E-85 stations as well as direct tax incentives for those who purchase and use E-85 gas.

But enough asides. I’ve lost one of my speakers, so I may have a couple of extra minutes, and I thought I’d ramble a bit and give a specific example. Enough background and statistical baffle-gab. What is this really all about? I want to get into that.

While Ontario co-operatives have a proud past and a very bright and promising future, this will only happen if the sector and governments are able to find ways to take collaborative action together. This is something that was clearly outlined in the Ontario Co-operative Association’s recent white paper entitled *Capturing Co-Operative Opportunities*.

I believe there’s a need to encourage an economic secretariat to focus on the affirmation, encouragement and nurturing of the co-operative approach to economic development, supported with information, research and the sharing of expertise. I believe that through a dedicated and integrated structure, supported by government, we can provide both a better focus and a more cohesive voice within government with respect to this important area. I have had conversations with the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. She’s quite keen to explore this, so that’s helpful to know.

The federal government already has a co-operative secretariat—it was started in 1987—which is really doing

some really important things. I’ll take a couple of minutes a bit later, but I just want to take a second to acknowledge Teena Shah, who is with us. Maybe Teena could stand up. Teena is a graduate student from Wilfrid Laurier who has been doing some research. And there are special guests here today from the Ontario Co-operative Association: Denyse Guy, Martin von Wuthenau, Jennifer Heneberry, Harvey Cooper, Elizabeth Record, Carolyn Lemon, Cathy Lang, Cynthia Stuart, Melinda Zytaruk and Joseph Zebrowski. I want to welcome them this morning as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): This is an interesting motion. It talks about the co-operative movement, which, I guess, has a somewhat checkered history. You can look at the agricultural sector and can see a large number of co-ops that have developed over the years. Personally, I’m a member of one of them, so guess I can’t be too hard on co-ops. Some of them have grown to be extremely large. Gay Lea Foods, for instance, as the member mentioned, is a large and very successful co-op owned by the Dairy Farmers of Ontario. I think that part of the success of Gay Lea Foods must lie in the fact that they have a very good management structure.

Obviously, when you’re a member of a co-op, you take great interest in it and perhaps you might even want to get somewhat involved in the running of the plant. You can imagine that a general manager or a president of Gay Lea Foods answering to a large number of dairy farmers who have their own particular way of thinking would be a very untenable situation. I think we can all imagine that that situation wouldn’t last very long and that either the management structure would have to be set up and changed or the company would no longer exist. Given that Gay Lea Foods has a long and proud history in the dairy industry in Ontario, and having branched out somewhat from the dairy industry as well, they obviously have a management system that allows for the independence of management to conduct their business on a very businesslike schedule.

I don’t think it really matters very much how the ownership of the company is structured. I think what matters is that the company has good management, that it’s well motivated, that it understands its marketplace and that it conducts itself on a very businesslike basis. The success of Gay Lea Foods and other co-ops would be based on the fact that they run their businesses extremely well, not on the fact that they are a co-operative. Being a co-operative is incidental to their success, I would suggest.

One of the other large co-ops in the food business in Ontario is the BC Tree Fruits co-operative, which markets most of the BC apples that are grown in the Okanagan Valley, mostly around Kelowna and Penticton. We see those apples in the chain stores—mostly Red Delicious, Golden Delicious and Spartan apples; I think those are three principal varieties that they market here, although they do grow many other varieties in BC. But watching that marketplace grow up, rise and fall has impacted the management of BC Tree Fruits over time.

I remember, probably back in the 1970s, I think the chap's name was Ian Greenwood, who was the general manager of BC Tree Fruits. One year they had a bad crop, and another year, Washington state, which grows about 10 or 15 times as many apples as BC, had a bumper crop and BC had a minor crop, and of course the marketplace was poor that year, to say the least. They weren't getting the return from their fruit because Washington state was in surplus and that was driving the prices down. Poor Ian Greenwood suffered the fate of a poor marketplace and was let go, through no fault of his own.

I always felt that Ian was one of the best marketers in the area. I know that several packing houses in Ontario tried to hire him as soon as word got out that he was dismissed, but he decided not to move to Ontario. He loved the Okanagan—having visited the Okanagan, I can understand that love—and he got another job in a related field out there. But it was because he worked for a co-operative and a lot of people were dissatisfied with the marketplace and perhaps didn't have the intimate knowledge of what that marketplace was doing and how it got in the situation it was in that was the reason for his demise, which was too bad.

BC Tree Fruits also expanded, as a co-operative, into the processing business, and owns Sunripe Foods. Sunripe Foods started out processing apple juice and has now gone into a broad range of foods—primarily juices, but other foods as well—and marketed those very successfully. I think that part of the success of Sunripe Foods is that it is once removed from the co-op. It is an independent business, run on a very professional basis. It has a sales force across Canada and in export around the world. It's a very successful organization, but its structure is once removed from the co-op that manages BC Tree Fruits, and I think that has a lot to do with its success. The quality of people who are involved in running any business is what contributes to its success, not necessarily the structure in which it organizes.

Another chap I remember from BC Tree Fruits, one of their marketing specialists—I guess he was a broker in Toronto—was Dave Austin, who marketed BC Tree Fruits in the 1960s and 1970s and, I think, even back in the 1950s. Again, he was a very, very high-quality food broker in Toronto. I don't think Dave is with us anymore; he was old when I knew him. But he was a wonderful, high-quality person who represented a very high-quality product, and I think sometimes those two things do go hand in hand.

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The United Co-operatives of Ontario operated in the farming community in Ontario, and I think they did fairly well over a long period of time. I'm not sure when they started. I think they started somewhere in the 1940s, but through the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and into the 1970s they expanded and did very well. It was a place where farmers, particularly grain farmers, could buy their seed in the spring and deliver their crops in the fall. They could buy their fertilizers. Any profit that accrued to the individual co-op they were doing business with was split

between the farmers on a proportionate basis if they were members.

It grew and expanded and did very well, until they got into some problems of expanding into areas that they perhaps were not as aware of, that they didn't have the basis of knowledge in. They did some of the things that many companies do; they didn't keep their costs under control and eventually declared bankruptcy, went into receivership. That was a huge blow to a lot of farmers around Ontario, and it happened in the late 1970s, early 1980s, I believe. But I don't think their demise was because they were a co-operative; I think their demise was because of the situation that they found themselves in and because the business environment that they were in just wasn't a very healthy one, and they weren't very well prepared to withstand the particular situation that they found themselves in. That could have happened to a business structured on a share basis, an independent proprietorship, a partnership or a co-operative. It didn't really matter that it was structured as a co-op.

Federated Co-ops is a co-op that operates in the three Prairie provinces, and it's interesting that they developed and have great success on the Prairies, because the Prairies are a unique part of Canada. We talk about small-town Ontario; small-town Canada exists on the Prairies. Those are very small towns, and they don't have the infrastructure and they don't have the size, I guess, to warrant many of the services that might otherwise be provided in a larger place, so the co-ops came along. In a very small town in Saskatchewan, you might find a co-op store where you could buy food, for instance, a grocery store; you could buy all the materials that you might need for your farm—fertilizers, tools and equipment; you could bring your crop into the co-op when you harvested it. There was a travel agency corner in some of those stores, and if you wanted to book a trip somewhere, they would supply you with that service. There were insurance facilities where you could buy your insurance. But it was a co-operative that was based on the fact that these very, very small towns couldn't have the services that people would need, and they would have to drive great distances to get some of them. Again, that was very successful.

I used to sell to Federated Co-ops when I was a salesman in a different life, and they were always very aggressive salesmen and always very good, very fair, but they wanted the best price. They were very aggressive in that way, and I think that's just a trait of a successful company. So dealing with Federated Co-ops or dealing with Safeway, which is another large chain that operates in the Prairies, in the larger centres, there was very little difference between the two. Safeway was one of the best-run chain stores in Canada at that time, and the co-ops were also extremely good and very, very competitive.

So it wasn't the fact that they were structured as a co-op. They could have been structured as a small business; they could have been structured as a partnership or a single proprietorship. The co-op nature of the business didn't give them any advantage, so I'm not sure how this resolution is going to improve the lot of Ontarians.

Another example of a co-op is the TREC WindShare co-op. Most of us in this place are familiar with the wind turbine that generates electricity that's located on the grounds of the Canadian National Exhibition, the CNE, down by the lake. That's a turbine that generates electricity. I think it generates about 750 kilowatts per hour when it runs, and it runs sporadically. It only runs when the Ontario power generators are buying electricity at high prices, because I think they can only afford to run that windmill when prices are above 11 cents a kilowatt hour or somewhere in that ballpark. They can only afford to run it when prices are above that rate, which only happens during peak periods, and only happens during those peak periods when there's peak demand. We're having a warm fall, a warm December. There isn't a huge demand for electricity, either for heating or cooling, and I've noticed in the last several weeks that that wind turbine has been turning very sporadically; in fact, it has hardly been turning at all.

One of the things that this resolution is trying to develop—it wants a co-operative secretariat or it's suggesting that the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade advise the government on whether or not we should have a co-operative secretariat very similar to what the federal government has. In reading how this Co-operatives Secretariat works, what its premise is and what its job is—for instance, it says, "Ensure that the needs of the co-operative sector are taken into account by the federal government, especially in the development of policies and programs."

It sounds to me as though this secretariat is an inside lobbyist. When the government brings in bills that are going to affect the private sector, private sector associations or private sector companies go and talk to the government and indicate to them how this is going to impact their business, whether it's going to be good or whether it's going to be bad, whether it's going to be more costly or whether it's going to save them money. They bring that knowledge to the government, and people refer to that as lobbying tactics.

In the case of co-operatives, the federal government has its own in-house lobbyist in the Co-operatives Secretariat. I really don't understand why, as a member of the public, I should pay taxes to supply the federal government with an in-house lobbyist when the private sector does it out of its pockets. The co-operative sector, at least federally—this motion is to encourage the provincial government to do it provincially, to have an in-house lobbyist that I pay for out of my pocket with my tax dollars. For that reason, I question whether this is a bill that we should be supporting in this House.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I'm delighted to join in this debate and support our colleague Mr. Ted McMeekin in his resolution. What does Mr. McMeekin actually want? He says that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should commit to promote, basically, the co-operative model of business. It's simply to promote. It doesn't say we're going to pass anything into law; it simply says to promote this type of co-

operative model of business in Ontario. Then he goes on to say, "That the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade commit to investigating the establishment of a co-operative secretariat."

I know this will be unanimously voted on today, because it is a step in the right direction. The co-op movement in Canada has a long history, as all of us know, especially those in the gallery today who are supporting this bill and who are really in support of the co-op movement.

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Most people who are in the big cities may not understand the full impact of what a co-operative actually is. I know that when I go to Sutton, Ontario, I see the co-op sign. In Toronto I don't see very many co-op signs, but since I have an understanding from Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC and Quebec in a different life that I had previously—if I had enough time to discuss this—I am somewhat familiar with the co-op movement. But for most of us in the cities, these signs simply indicate it's a different kind of business. Well, this business was established as a co-op movement, as the member from Halton so eloquently indicated, as a self-help organization, mostly and ubiquitously established in the Prairies.

When I got my honours BA from Laurentian University, I had the pleasure to go out and work every summer at a different place in Canada. So the first time I really came in contact with this co-op movement was in a one-grain-elevator town in Saskatchewan: population, seven farms; nearest post office, 25 miles away on a dusty road—Stoughton, Saskatchewan. Did they have a co-op? They did. As was indicated previously, this co-op in Stoughton, Saskatchewan, had everything in it. But, my friends, I tell you this: It wasn't just Estevan and Stoughton or a town just south of Regina near the US border where one of the famous politicians of Canada comes from, and I know the member from the NDP will know where he came from. Where did he actually come from?

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Who?

Mr. Ruprecht: Well, who is your most important—

Mr. Bisson: Tommy.

Mr. Ruprecht: That's right: Mr. Douglas. Where did he come from?

Mr. Bisson: Weyburn.

Mr. Ruprecht: Weyburn, Saskatchewan. Did Weyburn have a co-op? Of course Weyburn had a co-op. Every small town in Saskatchewan and almost every small town in Alberta has a co-op. Whether you go to Fort Assiniboine, Alberta, near the Athabasca River, very far away from Edmonton, north of Edmonton, every small town has a co-op. That was the only way they could help each other, whether they started an insurance business or whether they started a business that had to do with finances, like a credit union.

Not to get off my topic, I had the pleasure, by the way, two days ago to speak at the newly founded—actually, I should say the newly established—offices of the Portuguese credit union in Toronto. They were already 40 years old when 24 Portuguese people came together and

said, "We're going to start this credit union because we have to help each other in Canada. We don't speak the language. We have a few dollars. We want to have credit, we go to the banks, and guess what?" The banks would not give new immigrants any credit in 1966 when they first began this co-op movement in terms of the financial sector. So they had to get together. In a way they were forced to get together—and I'm glad Peter just arrived, because he was there too. We were looking at the walls of this credit union, and guess what we saw on the walls at the credit union. We saw Vasco da Gama, the great explorer, and Cabrillo, the other great explorer, taking these small ships all over the world. For them, my friends, that was very fitting, because these photos and these paintings indicated that they too were on a journey, but this journey was in Canada, a new country. This journey was to establish a new financial sector. That was also not a sure thing, just like Cabrillo and Vasco da Gama when they crossed the seas to find new countries and new places and new continents. They too were finding a new beginning in Canada, a new financial establishment. They weren't sure what was happening here. They were just taking baby steps to begin, to start, as all immigrants had to do. But they had the wisdom in 1966 to say, "Let's get together, because we can't buy a new house, we can't get a mortgage, we can't get insurance."

So I was really surprised when the member from Halton indicated how great the co-op movement was and how it should be supported by all of us, but then he said he wasn't sure because he thought the co-op secretariat would be an in-house—what did he call it?

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Lobbyist.

Mr. Ruprecht: An in-house lobbyist. Let's get one thing straight. That is, first, the federal government does have a secretariat that helps the co-op movement throughout many industries. That's very important, obviously. I'm not sure that I would go as far as to say that this is nothing else but a glorified lobby group. The co-op movement, by its very design, by its very foundation, is organized to help its members. Consequently, it has policy implications that go much beyond the bottom line of looking at the dollars. So while most businesses are interested and while most businesses are looking at the bottom line—that's the most important aspect in the end—there are policy implications for co-ops that are much more important and go beyond the bottom line, because they are social implications. If Portuguese seniors and Portuguese explorers in the beginning, coming into Canada, were looking only at the bottom line alone, they would not get out and try to help each other. The whole co-op movement is organized to help each other. In Toronto, we have co-ops in housing too. We have housing co-ops here, and that is very important.

I could go on, and I have a much greater say in all of this because I have some experience in all of these other provinces where this co-op movement was established, really, and where it flourishes. But today I'm supporting Mr. Ted McMeekin in his desire to explore the possibil-

ity of establishing the secretariat, because it is very important for the future of the co-op movement.

Mr. Bisson: Good day, everybody. Good morning. How are we all doing?

Why did I start the debate with "Good day"? I've never done that before.

I just want to say that obviously the New Democratic Party caucus will be supporting this motion. This is something that's very in keeping with what a lot of people in society, let alone New Democrats, think is important in regard to giving an alternate way of doing things on the economic front in our local communities. In some communities, this is a good option and in fact I think would be a good option in all communities, depending on how we go at it.

I want to say—and I hate to use the members' time to criticize this government, but I have to, because this motion speaks directly to the problem that we're having in many places across Ontario, but specifically where I come from, Timmins-James Bay. It has always been that people, especially in northern Ontario—I always relate northern Ontario to sort of like the Saskatchewan of Ontario, in the sense that people there understand that government, at the end of the day, could be part of the solution. People in northern Ontario look at government differently than they do in other parts of the province, understanding that if the government is not at the able working with them in order to find solutions to their problems—either economic problems or infrastructure problems or whatever they are—it's just not going to happen. I think this particular motion speaks to that, and I just want to go down that road for a bit.

We have been undergoing—and members will not be surprised that I'll talk about forestry yet again. We have had this mixed blessing in northern Ontario. In the community I come from, Timmins, and Sudbury and others, we have a boom in mining. Gold prices are up; base metal prices are up; the mining sector is very active. The first diamond project to be going into production is in my riding, in Attawapiskat, and it's going to spend over \$1 billion to develop that project. There are literally hundreds of people working on that directly in the mining site. Many First Nations people have got work through that and many people in Timmins and the area communities are feeding the work that is going on up in James Bay. At the same time, mining projects all across the north are basically a great place right now to be looking for work because the mining sector is doing quite well.

However, as we know, things are not always well. In this particular case, the forestry sector has basically fallen flat. There are a whole bunch of problems, and I will argue that some of them are in our control and some are not. But the ones that are in our control, the issues that we could do in order to assist the forestry sector to restructure, are not being done by this government. The government has taken the position that they are going to pursue a laissez-faire economic strategy, and whatever happens at the end, when it comes to the forestry sector and how things shake down, is just naturally the way things have to go.

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This motion basically contradicts that, and that's why I want to support this as a second point. I truly believe, because it's been done before, that many of the mill closures that we've seen in northern Ontario, in places like Opasatika, Smooth Rock Falls, Timmins, Thunder Bay—and the list goes on—could have been averted and completely stopped if the government had chosen to be a little bit more co-operative in its work with those northern communities to find solutions.

Are there tough challenges? The answer is yes. There's no question there are things happening in the industry that make it very challenging for the industry to stay viable. But are there things that we can do provincially to help overcome those difficulties? The answer to that is yes. That is why many people in northern Ontario are as mad as heck at the McGuinty government, and specifically Mr. Ramsay, for not rising to the challenge of working with communities.

I want to use a couple of examples. The first one is Opasatika. Opasatika had a sawmill that was owned by Tembec, which operated with about 100 people all told, management and staff. In a small community of 900 people, when the only employer in town shuts down, it's a pretty tough thing to take. Here's the irony. This particular sawmill was making money, but from a corporate perspective, the company that owns it, Tembec, said—and I'll just make up a number—"We have 10 sawmills. If we can make the same amount or more by operating with eight or seven sawmills, our shareholders will get more money."

I understand why Frank Dottori and the board of Tembec made the decision to shut down Kirkland Lake, Chapleau and Opasatika. I don't support it, but I understand it. From a business perspective, they said, "If the government is willing to allow us to take the timber that is normally allocated to these mills, move it somewhere else and have larger supermills, we can make more money, and we will do that." The government was complicit in that decision.

If the government of the day, in this case the McGuinty government and the Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Ramsay, had only said, "Tembec, we understand you're having a tough time. You want to close down Kirkland Lake, Chapleau and Opasatika, fine. That's a corporate decision that you have to make. We're telling you two things: We're prepared to work with you to keep them open, but if you ultimately decide to close them, by the way, the rights on the wood are not going to get transferred. It belongs to the community." That's a co-operative model that we should be following. If the government, Mr. Ramsay and Mr. McGuinty, had done that, I guarantee you that Opasatika, Kirkland Lake and Chapleau would not have shut down, because they were profitable mills. It was a question of how much profit and how much money the corporation wants to make—which speaks to this motion.

We understand. I'm not going to stand here as a New Democrat and say, "Oh, the private sector is bad, and

these corporations are evil." That's not the point. They march to a different drummer. They march to the instructions of their shareholders, the people on the board. They're there to maximize return on investment. That's what drives them. But that may not necessarily be good for the people who live in our communities, especially in small-town Ontario.

When you have large, multinational companies or, in some cases, large Canadian companies that are making decisions that are going to affect the wherewithal when it comes to the economics of a community in a negative way, as we did with Opasatika, I argue that it is the responsibility of the government of Ontario to step in and say, "That's fine. You want to make a corporate decision to close down, that's your decision. We can't stop you. But there are some things we're going to do, and one of them is"—in that case, the government should have said, "We will not allow you to take the wood from the Opasatika mill, the Chapleau mill and the Kirkland Lake mill and transfer it to other mills within your operation so you can maximize return." I will tell you, if we had done that, they would never have shut those mills down, or they would have sold them off and we would have been able to spin them off into a new company, and those people would still be working.

This motion speaks to that to a degree, because what you're saying in your motion is what we've been calling for for a long time for northern Ontario—not just Gilles Bisson and Howard Hampton as New Democrats but community leaders, Liberals and Conservatives alike, who say, "We need to have the government be there as a player when these decisions are made by corporations that are going to impact negatively on our communities, to have the wherewithal within the government to do the things that have to be done to save them."

Another example is the community of Smooth Rock Falls. I've got to say, it's heart-wrenching. We've had an employer in that town—originally it was Abitibi that was there for years. It's a kraft mill, about 700 tonnes a day, employees, with staff, about 300-odd people, and ancillary jobs, probably 400. The only employer in town—gone, closed. Again, it's a question of the company saying, "We can't make enough money." In the case of Smooth Rock Falls, depending on who you talk to, some corporate people would say, "Oh, we're losing money," but then when you talk to them privately it was, "Well, we're not making cash. We're not losing money, but we're not making as much money as we need, and we need cash to pay off our debts. We see this as a drain because we have to make investments in that mill, and we're not going to use the cash to invest in that mill to keep it going."

If the government of the day—in this case Mr. Ramsay and Mr. McGuinty—had rolled up their sleeves and done what this member calls for, which is to have a co-operative approach to how we deal with that for Smooth Rock Falls, the mayor—at that time it was Réjeanne Demeules—and her council, the local union, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, the com-

munity economic development people and others could have sat down with Tembec to figure out how we rise to the challenge of keeping that mill open.

But at the end of the day, if Tembec still made the decision that, "We're going to close," as they did, the government had to be in a position to say, "All right, you've made a corporate decision. We need to make a public decision, and that decision is, all of the wood allocations to that mill are going nowhere else but to that mill. We're going to make it known that if anyone wants to buy this mill, the chips that are allocated to that mill from trees that are cut in different forests, which are allocated by minister's directive, will still be available to that mill. We are not going to allow you to spin off the hydroelectric dam on that river."

Imagine if Tembec decides to spin off the dam or go into the energy business themselves. They will be effectively taking one of the natural resources of that community, which is cheap electrical power, away from the possibility of keeping that mill open. We all know what electricity costs in the province. There's a dam sitting there that has specifically been built in order to furnish electricity to that mill, and if the government allows Tembec—and my suspicion is that they will, in the end—to either keep selling electricity into the grid at a premium, because the price of electricity is high, or to spin it off in some way, you're effectively closing the door on the possibility of that mill reopening.

I'm saying this publicly, and I know Tembec will read this and they'll get mad at me, but I'm here to represent the people who live in my community. I say it here: If, at the end of the day, we were to go to Tembec and say, "There are environmental considerations to the decommissioning of that mill. We are going to go through it with a fine-toothed comb and, Tembec, if you want to close down, there's going to be a cost of closure," it would set the conditions such that the company would have to make a decision. They would have to be much more co-operative in their approach to the community, the workers and the province, and say, "Okay, we're going to close down because we don't have any money, but we're not going to stand in the way of transferring this mill over to somebody else and allowing somebody else to buy it."

Is it possible? You're tootin' right it's possible. We did it before. I remember Kapuskasing, just up the highway, an hour's drive from Smooth Rock Falls, in 1992. The owner of that mill at that date was making a similar decision. He was going to idle two of the paper machines on that mill and bring it down to what they called the Darwin plan. It would have put hundreds of people out of work. It would have decimated the community of Kapuskasing. But at the end of the day, the community, the union and the government of the day—the New Democrats, in that case—positioned the company in such a way that they had to sell the mill at a reasonable rate to the workers. The workers effectively took control of that mill. As it turned out, Tembec ended up becoming the newly created company as a result of those actions.

But it was because the government was prepared to be a player. It was because, when the community came to the government and said, "We don't accept the mill closure in our community; it is our only employer in town"—it would be like walking into Oshawa and saying, "All of the car plants are closing down," and the government saying, "Oh well, that's laissez-faire economics. Whatever happens, happens." We didn't accept that, and as a result we restructured it, the employees took it over, they ran the company and for 10 years were quite successful and are still making money today. We did it in Atikokan; we did it in Thunder Bay; we did it in Sault Ste. Marie on two occasions—at Algoma Steel and at St. Marys Paper; and with the Algoma Central Railway we did a different thing. It wasn't worker ownership, but that a different issue.

My point is, the member is right. We can use the office of government—or the instrument of government, I should say—in a way that is positive for the people we represent. And government, at the end of the day, must always do what is right, not only for the shareholders of the company, because we have to be mindful of that, but ultimately for the people who live in the community. When the shareholders' principles and values get in the way and hurt a community and its members, that's where government has to stand and say, "Enough of that game."

I want to just digress a little bit to the other part of this, which is economic development, because that's really what this is all about. I was absolutely shocked when I set up a meeting with a company in Hearst called LacWood. LacWood has a state-of-the-art plant where they make furniture for Ikea. They make shelving units for Ikea, and that's their customer.

We had a meeting with Ikea where they were asking, "What kinds of things can the government do to help us expand and look at new markets, all of that kind of stuff?" I said, "Let's set up a meeting with economic development and trade." I was astounded, when we sat down with economic development and trade, to see that they didn't have programs to support employers like that to be able to expand their markets. There was nobody within the ministry to look at what markets are out there and what is possible as far as value-added products in northern Ontario. They just didn't do it. Their strategy, they told us, was the big automakers. That was their whole strategy. I say, that's great for the auto sector; that's wonderful. I think the auto sector should get all the support it wants. But darn it, there are a hell of a lot more people in this economy than just the auto sector. Forestry is one of the most important industries in Ontario, not just northern Ontario. It's one of the largest exporters. As far as our GDP, it's one of the biggest players in our economy. So I was shocked to see that the ministry did not have people working there who are at the disposal of entrepreneurs wanting to do value-added projects in northern Ontario and helping them identify where the markets are.

1050

Clearly, part of the problem we have with value-added, amongst others, is that somebody is going to have

a great idea to transform a piece of wood or a rock or whatever into some value-added product, somebody who knows how to do it well and is probably very good at managing their business, but what they don't have many times is the ability to identify where they're going to sell their product. It seems to me that this motion would, to a certain extent, advance that, that at least we could put people in place at economic development and trade to say, "Hang on, LacWood. We're going to work with you and see where there are other markets that you can sell your product so that you can grow and expand or so that maybe somebody else can get into the business." That's how you grow an economy.

The one thing I want to end on is that what really disappoints me with this government, above all, is their approach to how they've dealt with economic development and forestry in northern Ontario. The Premier has said it. Basically, the long and the short of his debate, if you close your eyes and listen carefully—he sounds like Mike Harris—he's saying, "It's laissez-faire economics. At the end of the day, what happens is going to happen." For us in northern Ontario, that's a non-starter.

So I will support this, along with other New Democrats. We think it's a step in the right direction. I'm glad we at least convinced somebody to do the right thing. He has convinced himself; I won't take the credit for that, because obviously this is something he cares about. But when a member of the government is prepared to stand up and say, "We're going to do something positive," I think it's incumbent upon us in the opposition to support it and give it our wholehearted support.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's a pleasure for me to take a few minutes to get on the record and support the resolution this morning from my colleague the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot.

Mr. McMeekin is a man who certainly employs the spirit of co-operation in his role as an MPP. I had the opportunity to be in his riding a few short weeks ago, an opportunity to discuss another issue related to source water protection. What struck me that morning, being with Mr. McMeekin and his friends, was the co-operation, bringing together people to deal with an issue, to discuss an issue and, ultimately, to come up with some ideas that might make the topic we were discussing that day—source water protection—more effective, more meaningful and more practical for a group that would be dealing with that issue. That's the co-operative spirit that Mr. McMeekin brings as an MPP in representing his riding so very well.

I just want to have an opportunity to reflect on some of the comments in this very fine document. It's a white paper on co-operative development in Ontario. The second paragraph down says, "While it is a highly effective type of business enterprise, a co-operative is different from other business models. Formed by its members to meet their specific needs, a co-operative, by its very structure, has social and public policy goals in addition to financial goals. For a co-op, there is always more than one bottom line." I think that's a very important philosophical underpinning for co-ops in Ontario.

On page 2 it says, "Public/co-operative partnerships can be an effective alternative social services delivery model, helping government to maximize returns on precious taxpayer dollars"—and I know the member is always concerned about getting a return from our precious taxpayer dollars. "In health and housing, for instance, studies show that co-operatives can deliver services at a lower cost than the private sector. Ontario co-operatives are also active in a number of other areas that are ripe for public partnership, including home care, child care, elder care, education, renewable energy, aboriginal business, rural development and sustainability, community economic development, and financial services in small communities."

I'll just talk for a moment about a real-life example from my community in Peterborough. In 1960 there were 4,800 employees at Canadian General Electric in Peterborough. Many of them, just post-war, were young families wanting to build new homes, wanting to renovate existing homes, perhaps take out a loan to buy that first new car. At that time, they looked at the chartered banks that were charging interest rates which for some of them were difficult to meet. So they formed a credit union in Peterborough called Cangecco, which, when you look at that, is the short form of Canadian General Electric Co. They put together this Cangecco Credit Union in 1960. It was an opportunity for just ordinary workers to sit on the board. It was an opportunity for just ordinary workers to learn about board governance. It was about opportunities for ordinary workers to develop operating policies. Those skills that were learned in those early days in the 1960s—learning about how to operate on a board, how to establish operating policies, how to market a product to employees—were really a learning experience for those individuals, who took those skills back into the General Electric plant and used them to further advance their career at GE. They also took those skills and were able to apply them to organizations outside the working environment, those organizations in a community where those skills to sit on volunteer boards are really required.

Under that, Cangecco existed until the 1980s, when it went larger than just serving Canadian General Electric employees and went to the broader public. It developed into what it is today, Kawartha Credit Union, with several branches throughout east-central Ontario. I know there's one in Lindsay, and there are several other branches serving east-central Ontario. It's certainly an opportunity to provide loans and other services that have that individual kind of personal service that people sometimes don't get in the large multinational corporations and the large banks.

There's also a personal connection to this. My wife's grandfather, Emmett McGerrity, worked for the United Co-operatives of Ontario for many years. I'm sorry my friend from Durham isn't here this morning. My wife's grandfather actually set up the United Co-operative in Ontario, which indeed is in the riding of my friend from Durham.

Another local example I'd like to talk about was the Greenhill co-op, which established itself in Peterborough right after the Second World War. It was an opportunity for a group of citizens to come forward where they would make a pledge: after they had spent their daytime hours working in various manufacturers in Peterborough, they would sign on to build homes. So every evening, after they finished their day's work, they would spend many hours building homes, and again on the weekends. The Greenhill co-op was a subdivision of about 30 homes. It took about five or six years to completely build that subdivision, but it was done on the co-operative basis, and after six years, 25 to 30 families indeed had their homes.

So this is a motion that needs our support. I commend the member for bringing it forward today.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. McMeekin, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. McMeekin: I want to thank the members from Halton, Peterborough, Davenport and Timmins-James Bay for their assistance this morning.

The whole co-operative economic movement is a community-based movement that calls for the investment of time and energy and resources, where people literally attempt to achieve together what they are unlikely, perhaps, to be able to achieve apart. It's my sense, as a government and as a member of this people's place, that we ought to be unabashed partisans of that kind of entrepreneurial pioneer spirit. When communities want to come together to achieve what they can't achieve apart, I think we need to celebrate that. We need to find whatever ways we can to help them pool their expertise, to acquire the added value that so often can be clearly shown to come in the whole fair trade movement, in some of the eco-friendly, cutting-edge technologies, and to stand with our First Nations in our isolated rural communities, as the member from Timmins-James Bay alluded to. I think that's really important work. We need to find creative ways to do that. To be useful at all on a good day, the government has to find ways to do that. We ought not to be in any way ashamed of that.

1100

I'm proud of the folks who are involved in the Ontario Co-operative Association, who every day get up and work hard at building stronger, healthier, more caring and compassionate communities, and of the students who come and do work at my office to help us pull this together. We need this. We need ways to stickhandle important issues between ministries. The minister is onside. I say, let's get on with it.

WEARING OF HELMETS

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario:

Recognize the safety benefits of wearing an approved helmet by those using bicycles, in-line skates, skateboards, scooters and similar devices;

Acknowledge that the original intent of legislative changes made by this Legislature to Ontario's Highway

Traffic Act in 1993 was that all cyclists should wear an approved helmet regardless of age;

Make helmet use mandatory for all cyclists in Ontario by repealing the regulation which exempts cyclists over the age of 18 from these legislative changes;

Explore legislative measures to make helmet use mandatory for those using other muscular-powered devices such as in-line skates, skateboards and scooters;

Take into account those who cannot wear a helmet because to do so would interfere with his or her religious beliefs or practices;

Instruct the Ministry of Health Promotion, in conjunction with the Ministry of Transportation and other relevant ministries and stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive education and safety campaign aimed at encouraging helmet use by those using bicycles, in-line skates, skateboards, scooters and similar devices; and

Ensure that any safety campaign also address broader safety issues related to bicycles, in-line skates, skateboards, scooters and similar devices, including the role and responsibility of communities in ensuring the safety of all those using such devices, as well as the special responsibility of motorists to ensure the safety of cyclists and others on our roadways.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Milloy has moved private member's notice of motion number 24. Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Milloy, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Milloy: I acknowledge from the outset the length of my motion that's presented here today. What I'd like to do is maybe boil it down to one sentence, and that is asking this House, through this motion, to acknowledge the fact that wearing a properly worn helmet that meets safety requirements can reduce injuries and even save lives in Ontario.

I think this a proposition that most of us in the House understand. There has been extensive scientific research done by leading experts in the field. At the same time, I think all of us would acknowledge that sometimes what speaks louder than data is the experience of individuals, of people who have been involved in serious accidents and, because they were wearing a helmet, were able to avoid death or avoid an injury that might have been much more serious.

Today I'm very honoured to have a number of proponents here at Queen's Park who represent both of these propositions: those who have done data and research studies as well as those who have experienced tragic falls.

As you can see, I have a great group here on both sides of the House. So with time limitations, I'd just like to acknowledge a handful: first of all, Dr. Charles Tator, head of ThinkFirst Foundation of Canada and one of Canada's leading neurosurgeons, who spoke eloquently this morning about the scientific and medical reasons for wearing helmets; also Dr. Alison Macpherson, a researcher at York University who has written extensively on this topic.

I'd also like to acknowledge a number of survivors who this morning shared their stories with great courage:

April Ferguson, a young woman who experienced an accident several years ago; Barrie Faulkner, a gentleman who experienced an accident just over a year ago; and Shelley Gauthier, who was involved in an accident in 2001—all of them bicycling accidents. The fact that they were wearing helmets, all of them stated very clearly today, is the reason they're alive.

The data are clear. Studies have shown that wearing a helmet can lessen the likelihood of a head injury by 85% and a brain injury by up to 88%. Although in a sense we're here today to talk about helmets, I'd also argue that we're here today to talk about human nature, that unfortunate belief we all have that we're somehow a little immortal, that all of us are a little too lucky or too smart or too fortunate to be involved in an accident. Yet we all know that isn't the case. The simple fact is that it could happen to any of us, and the results could be disastrous.

This Legislature, as the motion points out, made a very important first step in 1993. It passed a motion that was put forward by former MPP Dianne Cunningham from the London area. What that bill said was that everyone in Ontario who's riding a bicycle should have to wear a helmet. One of the strange twists of fate: The government brought forward regulations to enforce the provisions of that bill, and in those regulations exempted everyone over the age of 18. So in effect, the law as it stands in Ontario only deals with children and youth.

Don't get me wrong: This was an important first step, and studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of this law in reducing brain injuries and head injuries for children. But at the same time, studies have shown that it hasn't had a similar effect on adults, who don't have to wear helmets. In fact, a recent study by Dr. Macpherson, whom I just mentioned, showed that the rate of adults who are going to our emergency departments with head injuries as a result of cycling accidents is in fact on the increase. So only half of our work is done, and I think there's an obligation on this Legislature and on this government to continue it by making sure that all cyclists in the province have to wear helmets. Accidents don't discriminate on the basis of age. I'm not sure why our laws should.

There's something more than just the safety of adults. There's the fact that adults serve as examples to children, especially their own children. There's also the simple fact of stating the values of our society. If we believe that safety is important, if we believe that all of us have an obligation to take reasonable measures to ensure our safety, then enshrining that in law is a statement of our values and helps when we're educating all people, especially young people.

Mr. Speaker, as you may be aware—I believe you were in the chair—a little over two years ago I brought forward a private member's bill, Bill 129, which asked the government to enshrine obligatory helmet use, for cyclists and also for in-line skates and skateboards, in law. That bill passed second reading and languished on the order paper, as so many do. But at the same time, there were some technical problems that were brought to

my attention about its relationship to the Highway Traffic Act and scope and so forth. So what I've decided to do today is bring forward a motion as opposed to a bill. What this motion would do is address these issues in a broader way and put the onus on the government, in a sense, to deal with some of the technical matters.

First, I'm calling upon the government to remove this exemption that exists in regulation and make it mandatory for all cyclists to wear helmets.

Second, I'm asking them to explore the possibility of legislating mandatory helmet use for other, similar devices such as skateboards, rollerblades and scooters. Here again, the statistics bear out the need for this sort of legislation. I checked in a recent year, I think it was a year or two ago, and there were 8,000 young people brought to Ontario's emergency departments with emergencies from this type of activity, and of those, over 1,000 had head injuries—certainly a call for some action in this area.

1110

The final part of the motion that I presented today deals with the whole issue of education. One thing I've discovered over the last two years in my discussions with various groups and organizations that have supported this bill and been involved in cycling is that helmet use has to be seen as part of a larger picture. The simple fact is that we all have to ensure that we have safety on our roadways, that we have safety when we're cycling, when we're rollerblading, when we're skateboarding. That involves helmets, but it also involves making motorists aware of their obligations, making everyone aware of their obligations to follow the laws of the land when it comes to the Highway Traffic Act and other provisions and bylaws. So what the final part of my motion does is call on the government to educate people, first about the important need for helmets when you are involved in these activities, but second of all, about their obligations and responsibilities to move forward.

Specifically, I have asked that the Ministry of Health Promotion, which has a great interest in accident prevention, take leadership on this, along with the Ministry of Transportation. I believe that for a law to be effective, individuals have to understand the reasoning behind it. At the same time, I believe that for an education campaign to be important, it has to have a bit of teeth that the type of legal imperative we're calling for today would give it.

I think the combination of legislation and education will go a long way to creating the type of society where none of us will get on a bicycle or put on a pair of rollerblades or a skateboard without wearing a helmet automatically. All of us know about the experience of seat belts. I'm old enough, unfortunately, to remember a time when seat belts weren't mandatory in the province and certainly not many people wore them. Now we drive 20 feet in a parking lot and it's automatic. So the hope of this motion is to create this sort of culture of safety, because at the end, it's about the individual.

It's about people like April Ferguson, who spoke today in very courageous terms about how she was setting

out a few weeks before her wedding and was involved in a serious accident, but because she wore a helmet, she was here today to tell the story. It's about Barrie Faulkner, a gentleman who was riding on a very quiet road in his community, one where he said there's hardly any traffic, and due to a mishap, he was involved in a crash involving his head. He was thought for the first few minutes to be dead. In fact, he survived and is making tremendous progress. As he spoke this morning at the press conference, it was because he was wearing a helmet. It's people like Shelley Gauthier, who was also here with us today at Queen's Park, who was involved in an accident on a bike trail and, again, because she was wearing a helmet, she's here today to share her story with us.

That's what it's about: It's about the personal stories, as well as the survivors and the people I've brought forward today. I also have representatives of numerous groups who work with people who have had brain injuries—safety advocates—and they can tell you of countless situations and countless instances where people have been spared tragedy because they've been wearing a helmet; and unfortunately the inverse, where tragedy has struck families, has struck individuals because people weren't wearing a helmet.

I was at a recent conference and, at the end of the day, someone stood up and very passionately spoke out saying, "It's only a helmet." And it is only a helmet. It's a small thing to ask to make people safe, to make sure that our province moves forward as a place where safety is paramount.

Interruption.

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask our guests to remain quiet but enjoy the proceedings. Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I certainly do appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the debate brought forward this morning, to speak to the motion from the member for Kitchener Centre which focuses on the importance of the issue of approved safety helmets for cyclists, in-line skaters, skateboarders, scooters and similar devices. We support the intent of the resolution brought forward by my colleague from Kitchener Centre and especially the development of this comprehensive education and safety campaign aspect of the resolution.

I welcome the members from the gallery, too. Your enthusiasm is great. We just have some rules in here where you can't applaud, but we appreciate your enthusiasm and all the contributions you've certainly made to the development of this resolution. Especially, a thank you to the survivors, who experienced it first-hand and saw something they could do so it didn't happen to other people. So I appreciate the contributions and the time you have given the member for Kitchener Centre.

As it currently exists, people 18 and under are required to wear safety helmets and adults are encouraged to consider wearing helmets, so the education aspect of this resolution is very important. With the younger generation, with my nieces, when we go horseback riding,

sometimes I don't necessarily reach for my helmet first thing. Theirs are on, and they tell me that I can't go out unless I put my helmet on. So the younger generation is getting some form of education and they share it with the older group—as I say, myself.

It has been mentioned, and I also want to mention, that the PC member of provincial Parliament Dianne Cunningham should be recognized and credited for bringing in the Ontario helmets law through her private member's bill many years ago when she was a member of the third party of this Legislature. I want to thank her for her past work. It makes good sense. I recognize the member for putting forward that we should be enhancing this, especially the education aspect.

Head injury does not discriminate on the basis of age. When we see the police reports we get on our computers and if there's been a cyclist accident with a van or some accident, it's usually people over 18 who have been involved in those accidents, whether cycling to work or not.

The member mentioned the need to work with different ministries, the Ministry of Health Promotion "in conjunction with the Ministry of Transportation and other ministries and stakeholders to develop a comprehensive education and safety campaign aimed at encouraging helmet use by those using bicycles, in-line skates, skateboarders, scooters and similar devices."

British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have legislation requiring all cyclists to wear helmets. There is some research here that says a properly fitted helmet helps protect the head by absorbing the force from a crash or a fall and decreases the risk of serious head injury by as much as 85% and brain injury by as much as 88%. Brain injury is the most common cause of death among cyclists, skateboarders etc. Approximately 50% of cycling injuries involve adults. Only 42% of cyclists in Toronto wear a helmet. That's surprising to me, but that's educating us as we discuss this private member's resolution this morning. A survey in 2002 by Safe Kids Canada found that 79% of Canadian parents support helmet legislation for both adults and children.

In my other profession, before I entered the Legislature, I spent over 20 years being a registered nurse in various settings, but a good portion was in intensive care in Lindsay at Ross Memorial Hospital. In the riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, in all its aspects, more and more cyclists are seen up there as more people are encouraged and as more trails are developed. I've seen countless people come in with head injuries from their different sports—just an accident that happened. You don't plan for accidents, but it's the type of thing where you should plan for the worst and hope for the best. It's a sad thing that these patients suffered injuries that could have been prevented if they had been wearing a safety helmet.

It mentions the seat belt law when it first came in, the restrictions and the pushback on that, and now it's such a reflex, as the member mentioned. You put it on in the parking lot before you leave to go onto the road. That

type of education campaign is what we need. I just got a police report in from Durham about an accident that happened yesterday with a cyclist and a van and the injuries that occurred.

It's also important to note that in many cases where injuries occur it's not because of anything wrong, where the victim wasn't paying attention. It happens: busy lives, we're in our cars, things happen.

It's interesting and somewhat ironic how often I see in-line skaters, cyclists and skateboarders wearing all the protective gear besides the helmets: the elbow pads, the kneepads and wrist protectors. Sometimes you see all the gear on the lower parts of the body and they miss the helmet. Sometimes they're not thinking. That is going back to the education component.

1120

Every jurisdiction where this type of legislation exists has shown a reduction in serious head injuries in children, young people and adults. Anything we can do to keep Ontarians safer, we need to consider in this Legislature and to educate as many people as we can. It's important that we strike the proper balance that ensures safety but also limits the level of government intrusion in people's lives. You do hear of some pushback.

We got an e-mail from a gentleman in British Columbia, where the law is in but is enforced arbitrarily. He's saying that it depends where you are. In Victoria, it's enforced. The cruisers were pulling him over. He didn't know why the cruisers were pulling him over. It was because he wasn't wearing a helmet. In Vancouver, it's not enforced as strictly. A key part is how we're going to enforce it. Will it be enforced equally across the province? All these things need to be considered.

We're hoping this moves forward. I know it was brought forward before. What's the next stage? Let's get it to committee. Let's get some feedback. How can we equally enforce it across the province? As I said, some examples have come in. Member from Kitchener Centre, we're getting examples from British Columbia, so people are paying attention all across Canada to your resolution here this morning. When you said "a culture of safety," it's an appropriate phrase to use. The how-to is always a hard question, but we can all work together on it, and I'm sure we will.

I appreciate the opportunity of speaking to this bill this morning. Another of my colleagues would like to speak to it later too. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I appreciate the opportunity to support our colleague from Kitchener Centre in terms of the helmet law. The member's motion, while significant and long, essentially boils down to the fact that we should make helmet use mandatory for all cyclists in Ontario. I know that probably most of us will support this legislation and this motion.

How many bicycle-related injuries are there in Ontario? I was astonished when I looked at the specifics of how many injuries there are and how many times our emergency department has to respond to these injuries. In Ontario alone in the past three years—get this—there

have been 27,898 emergency department visits. Wow, imagine that: 27,898. That's a massive amount, massive numbers of people who have to go to the emergency department and be treated because of accidents.

Do these injuries impact our community? Mr. Milloy gave us a very interesting fact sheet from which I shall read. According to ThinkFirst Canada, he says, each catastrophic head and spinal cord injury costs approximately \$4 million to \$8 million for health care, rehabilitation and lost earnings over a lifetime. Wow. Again, these are massive numbers: \$4 million to \$8 million for health care, rehabilitation and lost earnings for each case.

In my riding of Davenport, on Springhurst Avenue—I live on Springhurst Avenue—there is a group home. I've lived there for over 35 years. I've walked and cycled many times on Springhurst Avenue, and I see the results of these kinds of accidents. It is sometimes tragic to see people in wheelchairs and people who are trying to walk with a cane and with other equipment. Sometimes I even see people with two others trying to help them to take the first steps out of the home. When you see this kind of image in front of you, then you know something should be done, not just to protect and interfere with people's lives but to protect our citizens. So this helmet law, this regulation, must be changed and must be supported.

On a personal note, I want to tell you what happened to me. I was having my bike out with my girlfriend a few years ago and we rode down to Lakeshore. My house is very close to Lakeshore Boulevard. While I was looking to the left, I saw a car on the corner trying to make a right-hand turn. Because the traffic comes this way, the car driver was not interested in who was on his right. There were two bicycles almost parked next to the car: mine and my girlfriend's. While he was interested in looking to the left because of the traffic coming this way, he was not looking to the bicycles at all. He had no interest in looking to the right, where I and my girlfriend were standing. Consequently, as soon as he had a chance, he pulled the car over and turned right without looking, and he drove over—I just had a chance to pull my bicycle back. My girlfriend was to my left, and unfortunately she was caught. The tire of the car drove over her front tire and she was smashed, along with her bicycle, to the ground. Luckily, she wore a helmet, and hit her helmet against my pedal bar that was pulled back.

If she had not worn a helmet, we don't know what would have happened. The bicycle, of course, had to be replaced, and she had a few scratches. She came away with a fear of riding a bike again. But this, to me, showed that it is obvious what we have to do: We have to wear helmets.

I was the first one, being right in front of this kind of an accident, who from then on always wore a helmet. It is very clear that it is very important that this helmet law be passed.

There are other jurisdictions that have helmet laws in place. There is British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and the fines are not very high, apparently, if you're caught without a helmet. The

fine in British Columbia is only \$29; in Nova Scotia, \$25. PEI has the highest fine, between \$50 and \$100. I would say that these other jurisdictions also have had experience and also know about some of these very tragic incidents.

I'm therefore delighted to lend my support to this most important motion by my colleague from Kitchener Centre.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): First of all, I want to say I'm happy to rise and speak in favour of the resolution from the member for Kitchener Centre. But I want to tell the audience who are listening—first of all, I want to say, even though the Speaker doesn't want the audience to applaud, I appreciate the fact that from time to time there is somebody in the audience willing to applaud. So we very much appreciate that.

The Deputy Speaker: It's not the Speaker. I enjoy their presence. It's the standing orders, you know.

Mr. Hardeman: I'm sure the only person really interested in seeing those enforced is the Speaker. But we do appreciate them being here.

I do want to say, as my presentation goes forward, that even though I support the resolution, I do have some concerns, not so much with the resolution as with the process.

Safe Kids Canada reports that a properly fitted helmet can reduce the risk of serious head injury by as much as 85% and brain injury by 88%. Obviously, anything we do that would reduce the negative impact of misfortune is a good thing. As a parent, I know the fear and concern you feel when you watch your child going where they could get hurt or hurt themselves. That feeling is there as a parent, but it doesn't disappear because the child gets to be 18. In fact, we still want our children protected even after they have children of their own. I was pleased to reach that point this past year where my children have children of their own.

At the same time, I think we need to be cautious how this process would be implemented. There was a reason why the bill that was introduced and passed on behalf of Dianne Cunningham, one of my colleagues a number of years ago, stopped at the age of 18 as opposed to being for everyone who was on a bicycle: Those who were most vulnerable, those who needed protecting the most, were the ones who might not be aware of the risk they were taking. That's why I think it was important that there was legislation put in place that forced them or imposed upon them that they had to wear a helmet.

1130

Having this law in place encouraged kids to do the right thing and protect themselves. It also helped parents get their kids to wear their helmets. Obviously, it's very easy for a parent to say, "You must put your helmet on," but unless there's some mandated reason, they might not do it. It gave the police the right to step in when they thought a child was being reckless by not wearing a helmet. At the same time, limiting the helmet law to those under 18 meant that it restricted the law from being something that could be implemented and enforced. When you look beyond the age of 18, it's going to be

much more difficult for the police. It's a greater group of people who are also more difficult to look after.

One of the dangers of making the law too broad is that it becomes too difficult to enforce. Our police forces are dedicated and work incredibly hard, but we all have to admit that they have limited resources. We also need to be cautious as to whether the government is over-legislating or over-regulating. That is always a concern of the general population.

Perhaps it makes sense that adult cyclists in downtown Toronto should be wearing a helmet during rush hour, as the risk obviously increases with the amount of traffic. But does it also make sense to force an adult cyclist on a quiet, smooth—and I use the word "smooth" lightly—road in Oxford county to also wear a helmet? On a Sunday afternoon, cycling down McBeth Road where I live, it's quite possible you could go cycling for an hour and not see another vehicle in that whole time. So does it make sense, on a hot Sunday afternoon, that we have a law that says they can't do that unless they have their helmet on?

In fact, it's not just my opinion. I did receive an e-mail yesterday on this resolution suggesting that—it came from Woodstock. I just want to quote from it: "As the vast majority of head injuries happen to other groups of people such as motorists and pedestrians, it's hypocritical of Mr. Milloy, not to mention discriminatory, not to include all groups of people in his helmet bill who could possibly suffer head injuries."

I'm not suggesting that that is the be-all and end-all, but there is a risk of head injury regardless of where you are. In a head-on collision in a car, we're obviously going to have a lot of head injuries. Does that mean we should all be wearing a helmet and a faceguard and force people to do that because we want to totally eliminate that risk? We need to ensure that we are striking a balance between protecting people and protecting their rights and freedoms.

In addition to expanding the helmet law for cyclists, this resolution also calls on the government to recognize the safety benefits of wearing helmets for those using in-line skates, skateboards, scooters and similar devices. Again, I support that approach. I also support the approach of having more education and training for people in those categories.

I want to say that I did visit one of our local schools, and one of the questions from a grade 5 student was, "How do we go about getting the government not to force us to wear helmets?" So it isn't necessarily everybody who supports putting such restrictions in place.

Lastly, I just want to very quickly cover the process that we find ourselves in here. I recognize the challenges the member introducing this bill faces, having introduced a bill prior to this that went to committee and was then never called out of committee. It becomes very easy here in private members' business for everyone to stand up and speak in favour of something and then see it go to committee and never called back because it's just private members' business. So I think I recognize the need to put

forward a resolution to try and direct the government to get on with doing something about this issue, but the present government—maybe it's other governments as well—hasn't been very active in taking up direction from resolutions passed by this House and getting on with doing them. I had one passed in this Legislature a number of months ago asking the government to do something; in fact, it was supported by a majority in this Legislature. So far, absolutely nothing has been done to deal with that subject.

So I hope that as this resolution—and I hope it will pass—proceeds through the process, the government will have a look at this and start dealing with the issue, particularly with the education part of it, to make sure that our people are protected as well as they can be on our roads, highways and byways, and that we can leave this place and say that we did everything we could to prevent further injury.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches—East York): Two years ago, when Mr. Milloy last brought this topic up in private members' business, I stood in this House and I made probably what I consider to be the most difficult speech I have ever made in my entire life. I'm going to try today not to make it quite so difficult.

This is a bill, or actually a motion, that needs to pass. The difference between the motion today and the bill the last time—just to underline it for members of the House—is that this is a motion of the House requesting the cabinet and the minister to use the privileges that they have to simply change a regulation. It is not a bill. It's a very simple thing that is being asked here today and what I hope the minister and the cabinet will take to heart. It will not require hearings; it will not require committees; it will not require people to go out of their way within the government; it will simply take the will of the minister to go forward and do what is right.

I said it was a very difficult speech at that time, and it was. But I am also mindful that on that day two years ago, the last time this topic was broached, every single member from every single party in this House supported it. We all understand the necessity of having people wear helmets.

I, too, after the last speech, got phone calls. I, too, got e-mails and faxes of people who don't want to wear helmets. Some of them were quite abusive to me. I was really quite surprised, given the circumstances under which I spoke and the personal tragedy of my own family, that they would behave in that fashion. But I will tell you and I will tell them that there's no sense in sending me these e-mails and faxes and abusive phone calls. What is being proposed here must happen. It must happen if we are to save lives, and it must happen so that other families and other people do not have or meet the same end and the tragedy that befell us.

I am very saddened that nothing has happened over these last two years. I am very saddened, given the process, that Mr. Milloy has to come here again today and put this back before this House. He has explained to me, in only minor detail, because he obviously is a man

of great integrity, the member from Kitchener. He is a man of great integrity and won't tell me what transpired in his caucus or what transpired with the minister after this happened. But I'm given to understand through snippets that there is some problem and there was some problem in letting it go forward.

Now he's trying a new approach and, I believe, ultimately a much more successful approach. All this is going to do is take away the exemption that adults have not to wear a helmet. Right now, today, in the province, everyone has to wear a helmet, save and except an adult. That means every kid has to wear a helmet. But once you turn 18, somehow you're exempt from that. You're exempt from that, I guess, because you have, as the member from Oxford said, this sense that you have a freedom and you have your own responsibility, you can take charge of your own life, which you could not do a few months before, when you were only 17.

Well, here comes the difficult part. This is what happened to my family, to my brother. My brother was a very law-abiding man. I don't believe he was ever charged with any offence, even driving too fast. He did everything that the law required of him. When the law required that his children wear a helmet, his children wore a helmet. When he went out on the bicycle with them, they had a helmet and he did not—and he was an athletic guy. One day he hopped on a bicycle—it was the end of the summer, Labour Day weekend—and he did what he was supposed to do. He lived in the town of Brampton; his family still does. He didn't want to get in the car to go to the corner store because in Brampton, the corner store isn't on the corner; the corner store is literally miles away. He got on a bicycle and did not go on the road—I want the member from Oxford to understand this—he went on a bicycle path. The bicycle path was a couple of kilometres to the nearest store. He went on that bicycle path to pick up something and, en route—nobody knows what happened—on the bicycle path, not on the road, he fell off his bicycle. He was not wearing a helmet. He hit his head. Five days later, my sister-in-law made a very courageous decision and turned off life support. Five days after the accident, he died.

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I believe with all my heart that, had he worn a helmet, he would be alive today. I believe with all my heart that the statistics that have been cited, 85% reduction in head injuries and 88% reduction in brain injuries, would have been enough to maintain his life. You see, when he died, he had no other injuries. He didn't have any other broken bones; no car hit him. All that happened was that he fell off the bicycle and hit his head, and he fell off the bicycle and hit his head without a helmet on.

I want to make sure that what happened to him does not happen to anyone else. I want to make sure that his death was not in vain and that perhaps by my telling this story here today, people will know how important it is.

I see adults every day on the streets of this city, I see adults every day when I'm outside of the city, sometimes on little country roads, riding along without a helmet on.

In every case I want to stop my car, if I'm in a car, or just to stop them—I don't do it, mind you, but I want to—and tell them the story of my brother. I want to tell them how wrong they are to do what they are doing without taking proper precautions. It did not take very much for this to happen. It did not take any horrific event. I am sure it was simply an accident.

The members have cited some statistics that I believe were provided by Mr. Milloy, and I believe them as well: 5,078 people in the last three years, the majority of those since the last time we debated this bill, have been treated for head injuries as a result of bicycle accidents. Almost all of them were adults.

I think it is the responsibility of all of us as Legislators to learn from what has happened before. Clearly, a generation ago there was a debate in this House about wearing seat belts. I remember that debate, although I was not a member of the Legislature, and people talking about their personal freedoms and how they didn't need to wear seat belts; that it was their right not to wear a seat belt, but if the law required for them to buckle up their children, they would buckle up their children, but, "I'm an adult and I don't need to do that." This Legislature wisely, at that time, rejected that notion. We said that all persons must wear a seat belt. I remember that in the months and years that followed, there was a whole hue and cry. I remember seeing bumper stickers and hearing people saying, "You can't legislate my safety." I remember seeing all of that stuff. Wisely, the government, the police and the courts rejected all of those statements. Wisely, today you can look at the statistics of automobile accidents and the number of people who die from not wearing seat belts. You will see that the number has gone way down because we enforce people to do it. We make them do it. We tell them it's good, and it is good. It has saved a huge number of lives in the same way that this motion, if passed and if the minister obeys what the House is telling the minister, will save the same number of lives.

Perhaps there is another analogy which is even better, and that is the whole use of hockey helmets. When I was a boy, nobody wore a hockey helmet. I don't remember a kid who had a hockey helmet. We all played hockey and shinny and stuff, I wasn't very good at it and still am not, but we all played without hockey helmets. Nobody wore them at all, and then people started to notice the number of head injuries that kids were having from not wearing hockey helmets. Wise people came forward and suggested that kids should be wearing these, and eventually you started to see the odd child here and there wearing a hockey helmet. Nothing really changed. Some kids wore them, some didn't, until a remarkable thing happened: You started to see some NHL players wearing hockey helmets. They were not required by law to wear the hockey helmets but they determined that it was in their best interests to put them on.

Once the NHL players started to put on hockey helmets, so did the kids. Once there was this role model in front of them when they turned on Saturday night hockey and saw half the team wearing a hockey helmet, their

friends could no longer say, "Hey, you're a sissy," or "Why are you wearing that?" or "Does your mother make you do it?" It was seen as something they could do without ridicule. I can't remember the last time I saw somebody skating on the ice without a helmet, but it was a good, long time ago. The NHL finally came to its senses and made the hockey players wear helmets, and all of the junior leagues made them wear helmets. Every kid today who plays hockey and every player, no matter where it is on the road, wears one too.

The reason I'm telling this story about the hockey helmet is because children will emulate the response of adults. Children who see that adults are not wearing a helmet while they're on a bicycle, or hear a person who is 17 who says, "On the day that I'm 18, I don't have to do this anymore because I'm an adult," will change their minds. Or they will change their minds and they will do what is right and they will wear it. And the kids will grow to become accustomed to the fact that that is the way it is done. I believe that too.

I want to imprint on you again that this has been a very difficult speech for me. I hope I have made some sense. It has been a very difficult speech because of my brother Derek. I think back to all the things that he missed. I think back also, though, to what his family missed. I think back to the two kids and the wife whom he left. I think back to the difficulty they have had these many years in not having a father. They've grown up quite well. One has finished university and has her own business and the other is in university. My sister-in-law continues to work. But there is an emptiness that they have inside, and I can feel it, because I feel it myself. I feel it and know that we could have and should have done something about it.

I'm saying to the minister that when you get this motion—and I hope this passes today—have the courage of what it takes to simply do the right thing: End the exemption. You don't need anybody else's permission. You will know that this House, all members of this House and all parties in this House know that this is the right thing to do. Do not let the emptiness that still is within my family, do not let the emptiness that my parents share to this day, be visited on anyone else. It is a simple thing to do. For those naysayers, and I'm sure there are going to be some, who are going to send me e-mails and faxes and phone me and tell me I don't know what I'm talking about, I will remind them, and I did remind them, of what it means to me.

I salute Mr. Milloy for not giving up this fight. I commend him for taking the time to come back and look at why his last attempt did not pass and come at it from a different angle which, in the end, will leave it up to one person, and one group of people within the cabinet, to change a regulation. If we can change that regulation, if we can do what we need to do, we are going to save the lives of many, many people. But more importantly, we are going to set an example for children so that a generation from now, just like what happened in hockey, you will get on a bicycle, but before you do, you'll put on your helmet. You'll put that on when you're eight and

when you're 12 and when you're 15 and when you're 85. It won't matter whether you're in downtown Toronto in traffic or whether you're on a small country road. It only takes falling off that bicycle and one small accident to make a change forever. This bill, I hope, makes sure that all the changes that happen will be good ones.

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Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): As I did two years ago, I certainly intend to support the motion from my colleague from Kitchener Centre.

There are very few times when there is absolute quiet in this House. But there was, indeed, two years ago when two members of this House had great courage to share very personal stories with us about the ramifications of having adults over 18 not wear helmets when they were cycling. The member from Beaches–East York two years ago chatted about the tragedy of his brother, and my colleague the Minister of Health Promotion talked about a very close friend who lost his life while cycling and not wearing a helmet.

To me, it should be a very easy thing for the Ministry of Transportation, our colleague Donna Cansfield and the executive council to change the regulations dealing with the wearing of helmets while cycling for those over 18.

I've had the opportunity to chat about this issue with the local brain injuries organization in my riding in Peterborough. Two years ago they certainly pressed me to support the private member's bill of my colleague, and I indicated, when I heard that the member from Kitchener Centre was going to bring this back again, that this morning I would support the resolution.

I listened carefully to my friend the member from Oxford talking about bicycling on a quiet back road in rural Ontario and not wearing a helmet. About a year and a half ago, I talked to the local OPP detachment in Peterborough. One of the things they talked about that day was not accidents related to cyclists but car accidents that happen on rural back roads in Ontario. There's often a false sense of well-being, when one is travelling on one of those back roads, that perhaps because of the idyllic conditions on an autumn day in rural Ontario, you're not paying attention to the road as well as you should be, as one's mind wanders off thinking about other things. Indeed, there are many serious vehicle accidents that happen on those quiet back roads, even for people cycling, where something happens right out of the blue and they find themselves injured.

I think it's important that we move forward today and pass this motion to put pressure on the Minister of Transportation and the executive council, to make sure that we bring in this motion for people over 18 to wear helmets while cycling. I just think it's the right thing to do. It will prevent a lot of injuries and a lot of hospital care. I think it's important that we move forward on this motion today.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I'm delighted to stand today and support this motion from my good friend the member from Kitchener Centre.

We've heard stories that have been very touching and compelling, and they're all perfect. And I see the reasons

why this member is trying to deal with this motion, to move it forward, because of those particular reasons. But I'm going to put a little bit of a different spin on this. I'm going to focus a little bit on cycling, although I'm not a cyclist very much. Cycling has become very big in our communities these days. The use of bicycles has increased dramatically.

I was fortunate to be a member of a municipal council that was instrumental in putting in the waterfront trail that now spans from Niagara to the Kingston area, the Thousand Islands. It goes right in front of my house. I can tell you that many times, as I'm on my driveway, there are a number of cyclists who come down that bicycle path, a dedicated path that stretches across the north shore of Lake Ontario. I guess what I'm getting at is that there is more and more use of bicycles, and the more we use them, the more the percentage of injuries goes up, as we just heard, specifically head injuries.

As legislators, we need to think of that. We tend to always react when the statistics get way out of whack, and then we rush in and put in laws to try to fix it. But the unfortunate part of that is—

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): Prevention.

Mr. Rinaldi: We don't do enough prevention, whether it's health care or, in this case, to protect injuries from bicycles. We waited so long before we instituted seat belts in cars, and yet we knew for a fact that if a person was properly restrained in a vehicle, the opportunity for injury was very much reduced.

Sometimes we wonder why we wait so long to do certain things as legislators for the health and welfare of our communities. I know my friend from Kitchener Centre has made an attempt at this in the past. I'm sad to say that it hasn't progressed fast enough. But I hope, as we sit around here and debate this motion, we really see the importance of it, because an injury is not an injury until it happens. We can talk about it—"Maybe, maybe not. This could happen"—but when something happens, we always say, "It's too late. We should have done something."

I think we have to be a bit forward-thinking. I'm prepared and I hope the rest of the members of this House are prepared to support this, because I think it's—I'm not going to say that it's too late, but maybe we should have done it before. Let's do it now.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): It's not normal that a minister speak at private members' hour, but I felt very strongly about Mr. Milloy's motion. As Mr. Leal pointed out, I too had a similar situation occur to me—obviously not a relative. I very much appreciate the member for Beaches–East York talking passionately about the loss in his life of a brother as a result of an accident when his brother was not wearing a helmet. I had a friend—in fact, ironically, Mr. Milloy knows this friend, Carl Gillis—who was in-line skating and not wearing a helmet, and he tragically died prematurely. That's why I'm here to support this motion, as I was here to support Mr. Milloy's private member's bill.

Our Ministry of Health Promotion is listed in the motion, and if this House does adopt this motion, I very

much look forward to working with Mr. Milloy and members of the injury prevention community throughout the province of Ontario to do what we can to better educate people about the importance of wearing helmets.

We know for a fact that a properly fitted helmet helps protect the head by absorbing force from a crash or a fall and decreases the risk of a serious head injury by as much as 85% and brain injury by as much as 88%.

I also want to commend all of the medical officers of health. I know our former medical officer of health in Ottawa, Dr. Rob Cushman, is a leading expert in the importance of wearing helmets while in-line skating, skateboarding and riding a bicycle.

We are in the process in our ministry of putting together an injury prevention strategy. This motion, if passed, would be an ideal complement to making sure that we get it right and that we reach out to those groups that are doing good work to see if we can help them do a better job of getting the word out about the importance of wearing a helmet.

I want to commend Mr. Milloy, the member for Kitchener Centre, for the work that he's done, the persistence in making sure that this issue stays alive, because we know that if more people wear helmets, particularly past the age of 18, more lives will be saved.

I want to commend Dianne Cunningham, the former member from London, who brought forward the motion in the first place. Let's continue the good work she's done by supporting this resolution of Mr. Milloy's in the memory of people like Mr. Prue's brother and my friend Carl Gillis.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Milloy, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Milloy: I've appreciated the debate this morning in the Legislature. As I think I pointed out in my presentation, this motion is really about balance. It's about making sure that we have the type of legislation and regulation which makes people sit up and notice when it comes to issues of wearing helmets and, at the same time, that it's complemented with education and an education campaign that has real teeth.

I want to thank the speakers from all three parties who stood here today to speak in favour of the motion. Due to the brevity of time, I just want to comment on two speeches. The first is that of the Minister of Health Promotion, who is named in the motion put forward today in the sense that we are asking for a government education campaign. I just want to state my appreciation for his commitment here that, if passed, he will certainly make it part of health and safety campaigns that he's moving with in the future. The second person I want to pay particular tribute to, of course, is my friend from Beaches-East York. I want to congratulate him on his courage in coming forward to the Legislature and telling his personal story.

As I said at the beginning, data is important, research is important, but at the end of the day, it's the personal stories which I think convince all of us of the importance of helmet use in our province, and the fact that it can withstand so much and prevent so many tragedies. At the

same time—I see my time is running out—I do want to thank all the groups and organizations who have come forward to endorse my bill. The brain injury association in my own community of Waterloo-Wellington—I have to mention them specifically for the leadership that they have shown at home. They really encouraged me to move forward, and I was then able to connect with a large number of local organizations.

In closing, this motion does something very simple. It creates a culture of safety which hopefully is going to lead to a situation where no one in this province would get on a bicycle, go in-line skating or skateboarding without wearing a helmet. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

CO-OPERATIVES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall deal first with ballot item number 67, standing in the name of Mr. McMeekin.

Mr. McMeekin has moved private member's notice of motion number 33. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will call in the members after dealing with the next ballot item.

WEARING OF HELMETS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 68, standing in the name of Mr. Milloy.

Mr. Milloy has moved private member's notice of motion number 34. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1202 to 1207.

CO-OPERATIVES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. McMeekin has moved private member's notice of motion number 33. All those in favour, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Leal, Jeff	Ramal, Khalil
Arthurs, Wayne	Levac, Dave	Rinaldi, Lou
Barrett, Toby	Marsales, Judy	Runciman, Robert W.
Bisson, Gilles	Matthews, Deborah	Ruprecht, Tony
Bradley, James J.	McMeekin, Ted	Sandals, Liz
Broten, Laurel C.	McNeely, Phil	Scott, Laurie
Brownell, Jim	Miller, Norm	Smitherman, George
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Fonseca, Peter	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wilkinson, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wilson, Jim
Horwath, Andrea	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David
Jeffrey, Linda	Prue, Michael	
Kwinter, Monte	Racco, Mario G.	

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 40; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1210 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CONTAMINATED PROPERTY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I rise today to bring to the assembly's attention the lack of Ministry of the Environment action to deal with a big oil company's responsibility for the contamination of privately owned property and the impact the contamination has had on the lives of the owners and their family-operated business on the now polluted site.

My constituents Brent and Linda Carriveau discovered a gas leak on a property owned by Petro-Canada beside their restaurant west of Ottawa, at Silver Lake Provincial Park. The Carriveaus reported the contamination to the ministry six years ago, yet they've been left alone to fight with a large corporation to salvage their business. They have had to press ministry staff to visit the site to check neighbouring property, including the provincial park.

The Ministry of the Environment has never charged Petro-Canada for their irresponsibility and the damage incurred. They've effectively abandoned the Carriveaus to fight Petro-Canada on their own, and this big oil company with deep pockets is using every legal avenue available to delay a settlement and drive the Carriveaus to financial ruin. Last week, in a CTV news report, Mr. Carriveau was quoted saying, "We didn't have anything to do with this contamination, yet we're being left to fight this oil company on our own. It's like a mouse wrestling an elephant."

In this instance, the Ministry of the Environment has clearly neglected its responsibility. I call on the minister to get her officials involved and provide much-needed and -deserved support and assistance to the Carriveaus.

EVENTS IN NORTH BAY

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): Mr. Speaker, as you know, Christmas is always a great time of year and always a great time in downtown North Bay.

Downtown North Bay was awash in lights and a happy glow a few weeks ago as the residents of North Bay celebrated our downtown Christmas walk. Thousands of people came downtown to see the great tree lit and enjoy the hospitality of our downtown merchants. On November 19, we had a huge Santa Claus parade, which was a great success as hundreds and hundreds of young

people enjoyed over a dozen floats that came down on a bright Sunday afternoon.

Our downtown North Bay boasts some wonderful merchants and some beautiful storefronts. I want to highlight but two this afternoon. On October 27, Mr. Ralph Diegel, the owner of Deegan's Shoes, celebrated his 80th birthday. As well, he celebrated 60 years of working in downtown North Bay in his business, which has been in operation since 1889—that's 117 years. On November 25, Gulliver's Quality Books and Toys celebrated 20 years of business in downtown North Bay. Suzanne Brooks and her staff have been providing the people of northeastern Ontario with a great literary hub, as she stocks great books, great children's books and toys, and brings some fabulous authors into our community.

These two merchants, together with countless others, make downtown North Bay a great place to shop and North Bay a great place to live. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Ralph and Suzanne, to wish all of our downtown merchants a successful holiday season, and to wish all the residents of Nipissing a very happy and safe holiday.

MINISTRY SPENDING

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I rise today and hold a copy of an invitation to a bash held on December 11, hosted by the Minister of the Environment, here in this Legislature. The party was to pat herself on the back for her avoidance-of-responsibility legislation disguised as the Clean Water Act. Interestingly enough, neither the NDP critic for the environment nor myself were formally invited, although I do have in my hands this piece of partisan swag in the form of a baseball cap which the minister was handing out to attendees before they went to the bar and got their free drinks. The minister is not only a paper environmentalist; she's now fully engulfed in the business of partisan swag.

In light of the Auditor General's report and the obvious disregard of taxpayers' money by the members across the way, who paid for the open bar and these hats?

Next Tuesday, the purchase of the Green Lane landfill site will be completed. Is the minister going to make the taxpayers pay for yet another party? Minister Broten and her colleagues think it's open season on hard-working taxpayers.

The minister promised to meet all of Justice O'Connor's recommendations. Nowhere in these recommendations does it say to establish a separate piece of legislation that downloads responsibility to rural Ontario and nowhere in these recommendations does it say to use taxpayers' money and throw a partisan party with an open bar and baseball caps.

I would think the minister knows not to be using taxpayers' money for the back-slapping, open-bar party she probably hosted this past Monday, but I assure you the official opposition will be checking, just to make sure.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

ONTARIO ARTISTS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): I rise in the House today to acknowledge the professional artists and cultural workers who are unable under current legislation to improve their working conditions and livelihoods through collective bargaining, a right presently enjoyed by six million other Ontario workers.

During the 2003 provincial election campaign, the McGuinty Liberals promised to introduce status-of-the-artist legislation to improve the lives and incomes of Ontario's workers in the cultural sector. This promise was reiterated on May 15, 2006, by the Minister of Culture in her statement to the Legislature. Yet despite months of consultations, the Ontario government has failed to introduce legislation that would deliver improved minimum working conditions, enhanced economic and social benefits and collective bargaining rights.

Artists and cultural workers need protection for child performers, access to training and development programs and funds, income averaging and/or exclusion of certain incomes from provincial taxes, and protection for senior artists. Without these steps, the government will have failed all professional artists and cultural workers. They, and we, demand action now.

MARILYN ALEX

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I rise in the House today to pay tribute to a wonderful woman, Marilyn Alex, who will be truly missed by family, friends and the Hamilton arts community. Marilyn was tragically killed in a car accident last week.

I had known Marilyn from my first audition in 1978 to appear in the stage production of *Carousel* produced by Hamilton Theatre Inc. Marilyn was an inspirational choral director, mentor and friend to myself and all who loved music and theatre. She carried herself with dignity and was a gracious model to aspiring musicians, singers and actors. She was gifted with a wonderful full voice which could demonstrate tenderness and power to articulate any theatrical role.

Marilyn was well-known for her theatrical accomplishments. Her last performance was in a production at Drury Lane as Madame Armfeldt in *A Little Night Music*. She held many senior roles in theatre. She gave everything she had to her profession, always striving to be the best she could be.

She worked for Hamilton Police Service for over 20 years and Hamilton's CHML as a record librarian. She was the founding member of Hamilton Theatre Inc. and the Harlequin Singers. She was a member of Canadian Actors' Equity and ACTRA. She was a member of Choral Bells for over 50 years.

She is survived by her sons Adam and Timothy, two grandchildren and a brother and sister.

I am sure she is organizing a theatrical group of angels as we speak. I want to say thank you, Marilyn, for all you

have contributed towards making Hamilton a great city for music and theatre.

REMOVAL OF CHRISTMAS TREE

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm calling on the Premier and the Attorney General to publicly denounce the decision by Justice Marion Cohen to order the removal of a Christmas tree from the lobby of the Ontario Court of Justice in Toronto. The reason cited was that, "It is a Christian symbol that alienates people of other creeds and traditions."

This is an act deeply offensive not only to Christians, for whom in fact the Christmas tree has an enduring religious significance; it is also offensive to the many Ontarians of diverse faiths and culture for whom it has become a symbol of this holiday season and in many ways is in fact symbolic of goodwill for all.

Here in this Legislature, we have commemorated the Muslim feasts of Eid-ul-Fitr, the Hindu feast of Diwali, and this week we will also be lighting a menorah in honour of Hanukkah.

If there is any place where the fundamental principles of religious freedom and affirmation of our diversity should be abundantly evident, it is in fact at the centre of our justice system. The action taken by this judge is contrary to our best-established traditions of celebrating diversity and of tolerance. I therefore call on the Attorney General to intervene and in fact to undertake to ensure that Ontarians are not only able to celebrate their faith and culture, but that it will also be protected and respected by our justice system.

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DURHAM COMMUNITY
STRATEGIC PLAN

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I rise in the House today to draw attention to the wonderful progress being made by the regional municipality of Durham in realizing the objectives outlined in the Durham community strategic plan. I recently received the third update report on the progress in the implementation of their six objectives, and I want to highlight just a few of the many noteworthy initiatives going on in Durham region.

The first one is in regard to transportation. They're making tremendous progress with the establishment of a region-wide transit system with a single ticket fare, giving the public more choice for travel. The Salem Road interchange on the 401 is being completed, the Stevenson Road interchange is well under way, and the widening of the 401 between the two interchanges is under way. That is as a result of co-operation with the province of Ontario. An environmental assessment is moving forward on the extension of the 407 eastbound.

On the environmental front, Durham is partnering with York region to develop an energy from waste facility, thereby reducing landfill and producing energy, if it all

gets approved. All of Durham now has the green bin kitchen food waste composting program, so wet waste is no longer going to a landfill.

On the safety and health front, they are making progress with increased seniors' beds in regional facilities as a result of the rebuild of Lakeview Manor, and a second facility, Hillsdale Terraces.

On the economy, the Durham Strategic Energy Alliance is facilitating research, program development and implementation. Having the University of Ontario Institute of Technology in the community promotes a very educated workforce.

Finally, on partnerships and government effectiveness, they are partnering with many municipalities for supportive submissions on issues such—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

COMMUNITY GRANTS

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): As the MPP for the riding of York West, I am absolutely thrilled with the recent McGuinty government announcement of \$6 million in support of the community grant program. Our government has recognized the need and the work being done in various communities to reach out to our youth before they are lost to guns, gangs and a life of crime.

Premier McGuinty is partnering with various faith churches that are doing excellent work and bringing hope to so many of our bright young people. Indeed, the announcement at the First Baptist Church in Toronto, the oldest community institution working as a community and information centre, will lead the efforts to deliver the message of hope.

In my own area, the Jane and Finch area: the San Romanoway Revitalization Association; the Jane-Finch community centre; PEACH, the school away from school initiative; the Christian Centre Church; Lisle Memorial Baptist; and the World Centre for Mission Mobilization. The Black Action Defence Committee, as well, will be receiving a three-year, \$450,000 grant.

All these dedicated and caring people will be working to make a real, positive difference in so many lives: our youth, our most vulnerable, single mothers and those who suffer as victims of violence.

I compliment the work of the faith church organizations and the support from Premier McGuinty in partnering and delivering inspiration and hope—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

WORLD LEADERSHIP AWARD

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): As the member for Mississauga East and a member of the Mississauga Healthy City Stewardship Centre, I would like to say that we have won the 2006 World Leadership Award held on December 6 in the Royal Courts of Justice in London, England.

The purpose of the World Leadership Awards is to identify exceptional leadership in cities across the world

and to use that leadership as an example and inspiration to other cities facing similar problems.

Cities were judged on criteria such as leadership displayed, difficulties or obstacles the city has overcome and the degree of inspiration the city may give to others. Furthermore, this award is about communities: how a wide range of actors play in the role of building up a community to the point that the world recognizes the collective growth of a city.

Collaboration was created between the city and the University of Toronto, Mississauga. Fourteen key organizations in the city came together to collectively work toward improvements in local health. Working together, these organizations developed a Healthy Mississauga 2010 Plan that focuses on nine priority areas.

Receiving this award shows the level of commitment that exists within Mississauga to the idea of having a truly healthy city. We hope that being a recipient of this high honour will motivate other cities in this great province to adopt healthy ideas and policies.

REPORT OF CHIEF ELECTION OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table the 2005 annual report of the Chief Election Officer of Ontario.

NOTICE OF REASONED AMENDMENT

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 69(c), the House leader for the third party, the member for Niagara Centre, has filed with the Clerk a reasoned amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996, and the Executive Council Act. The order for second reading of Bill 173 may therefore not be called today.

VISITORS

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want to take this opportunity to introduce some visitors in the west members' gallery: Dr. Mathew Stephenson and his wife, Brenda Stephenson, and John O'Toole's executive assistant, Sheryl Greenham, who are here visiting today.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to introduce to the House today some members of 30 different cultural workers' organizations that gathered this morning. We have some representatives from ACTRA, the Brantford Musicians' Association, the Directors Guild of Canada, the Toronto Musicians' Association, the Writers' Union and, a little later on, the Ontario Federation of Labour, all here to see if we can't get status-of-the-artist legislation passed. Welcome.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion relating to a committee of the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that the following committee be authorized to meet during the winter adjournment: the standing committee on social policy, for the purpose of public hearings and clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 140, An Act respecting long-term care homes, on January 16, 17, 22, 23, 24, 30, and 31, 2007, as outlined in the subcommittee report.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): In May of this year, the McGuinty government launched a public review of the Endangered Species Act. Our goal is stronger and broader legislation, updated for the 21st century, that will protect and provide for recovery of species at risk and ensure that future generations of Ontarians benefit from a healthy, diverse natural environment. There is considerable work to be done during this review to ensure we properly identify and address the measures needed for optimum protection and recovery of species and their habitats, but I am very pleased to report to the House today that we will table new legislation at the earliest opportunity in the spring session of the Legislature.

We are grateful for the help we have already received from stakeholder groups, aboriginal peoples and interested members of the public who have participated in this review. These groups include farmers, rural landowners, land developers, environmentalists, rural communities, anglers and hunters, municipalities and representatives of resource industries, including forestry and mining. A separate process involving consultation with aboriginal communities and organizations continues to be ongoing. I'd like to note that most of the stakeholders that we have heard from strongly support improved legislation for species at risk.

1350

We're also grateful for the contributions of an advisory panel made up of individuals with expertise and experience related to species-at-risk protection and re-

covery planning. The members of the advisory panel worked with my ministry and provided input for a discussion paper that was used in the public consultations between May and June of this year. In a report submitted to the government in August, the advisory panel suggested a framework for legislation that provides effective protection and recovery measures as well as the necessary tools for practical application. We intend to use this framework in developing our new legislation.

We are proposing that the legislation include a science-based process for identifying and listing species at risk and will require the protection of species. A requirement for meaningful habitat protection will also be a priority in our proposed legislation. We aim to balance strong protection measures with flexibility to encourage stewardship and recovery efforts.

Encouraging stewardship is essential. Helping species at risk to recover can be costly and complex, so the best course of action is to prevent the species from declining in the first place through responsible land use stewardship practices. We already owe a great deal to the farmers and landowners who have been volunteering for years to help with the recovery program on their lands. There are also many environmental, agricultural and community organizations that have voluntarily taken on important stewardship roles to protect essential habitat and green space. We need the continued support and involvement of all of these groups and individuals; and we recognize, in turn, that we need to actively support new as well as existing stewardship efforts.

So with this in mind, our government is taking on a three-pillar approach to species-at-risk protection and recovery. The first pillar is providing incentives for on-the-ground stewardship activities, the second is an updated and strengthened law, and the third is ensuring that we have the means and the tools to effectively implement the proposed new legislation.

I am pleased to say that the Ministry of Natural Resources has already been working, through our natural spaces program, to facilitate private land stewardship. This government has been encouraging good stewardship through a variety of other programs, including the green-belt in the greater Golden Horseshoe, land acquisitions and new protected area designations. We have also supported the work of our conservation partners in several ways, including through enhancements to the conservation land tax incentive program and the Conservation Land Act.

As I said at the outset, our goal is to create better protection for endangered species in Ontario. We will accomplish this through effective stewardship programs, strengthened legislation and the development of the necessary tools for implementation.

FALLS PREVENTION

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The Minister of Tourism.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do have a statement, but it's in my capacity as the minister responsible for seniors.

I rise in the Legislature today as minister responsible for seniors to announce the launch of a new information program for seniors, the falls prevention seminar. I hope every senior in Ontario will take advantage of this program to help safeguard their well-being and independence.

Earlier today, I was joined by Community Care City of Kawartha Lakes, other service providers and seniors from Central Eglinton Community Centre to share ideas about staying safe and well this winter and, indeed, throughout the year.

A fall can have a drastic impact on anyone's health and independence, but especially that of Ontario's seniors. The facts are startling. Each year, more than 24,000 seniors are hospitalized due to a fall. Falls cause more than 90% of all hip fractures for seniors, and they account for a high percentage of all admissions to long-term-care homes. In the midst of these sobering statistics, there is good news.

It is estimated that 90% of falls are preventable by following a few simple steps such as slowing down; replacing scatter mats with non-slip rugs; securing extension cords or using a cordless phone to eliminate cords and wires; ensuring that boots and shoes are non-slip and waterproof; and making sure that sidewalks, steps and driveways are well sanded or salted and free of ice. These are simple things, but they are important things that take only a moment or two, and they can quite literally save a life.

To get falls prevention information to seniors, their families and friends, I launched today the falls prevention seminar program for seniors. We are working closely with Community Care Kawartha Lakes and have consulted over 30 other local, regional and national organizations to bring seniors the very latest information on falls prevention. The falls prevention seminar will be offered to seniors in communities right across Ontario.

My colleague at the Ministry of Health Promotion has been working with our partners at public health units to ensure that injury prevention strategies are a key part of program delivery at the local level. Through their work, the injury prevention public health program is striving to reduce the disability, morbidity and mortality that can result from preventable injuries.

I encourage all seniors in Ontario to attend this one-hour seminar to learn how to protect their health and independence.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of Natural Resources' statement on the proposed endangered species act.

Today's statement raises a lot of questions. For example, are you going to strike a balance that meets the needs of environmental groups, industry, First Nations and municipalities? Are you going to consult with all those groups? So far you haven't. At a time when the province is projecting the slowest economic growth in the country, are you going to do a full socio-economic impact assessment of the proposed species-at-risk legislation? Are you going to base your decisions on science?

Here's what we've seen so far. You've consistently neglected your duties to conservation and fish and wildlife programming. Your first act as minister was to close the Frost Centre. You dumped the Ringwood fish hatchery, but fortunately groups like the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters stepped in to take over the fish hatchery. You're starving operations funding for conservation officers—those who are left—so that they aren't able to properly do their jobs—many of their cars are parked—despite your election promise to fully fund the fish and wildlife program. You've cut programming in Ontario's parks and reduced support staff. You did away with counter service and public access for biologists and MNR specialists. I know that's the case at the Bracebridge MNR office and in other offices around the province. You were all set to cut the community fisheries and wildlife involvement program until public outrage prevented that. We've heard from the member for Nepean-Carleton about Bam Bam, the abandoned faun adopted by the Strabys and confiscated by the Minister of Natural Resources in a SWAT-style raid with three cop cars.

I've heard from municipalities in my riding about the species-at-risk provincial policy statement. In March 2005, the policy statement came into force in Parry Sound district. Municipalities were told that all their planning decisions had to be consistent with the policy. They've been waiting all this time for a tool kit that your staff promised would help them. So far, there has been nothing. According to Parry Sound municipalities, municipalities in Simcoe, Nipissing, Algoma and other parts of Ontario weren't subject to these additional responsibilities. It's just another case of poorly-thought-out tinkering on your ministry's part. It's also another case of failing to consult, in this case with municipalities.

The implications of this legislation are serious. What about First Nations who want to realize their potential through resource economic development? Have you fully thought out the impact on those communities?

For the past three years we've seen the results in the forestry industry of your policies of high energy costs, high delivered-wood costs, lots of red tape and thousands and thousands of lost jobs mainly across northern Ontario, but across all of Ontario.

The question is, are you prepared to push along legislation that has significant negative economic impact for our resource and development sectors, as well as hampering economic development for First Nations, or will you bring a balanced approach to this legislation?

1400

FALLS PREVENTION

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I don't know why I was asked to respond to this particular statement in the absence of Mr. Martiniuk, who is our critic in this area and who is much senior to me.

No one can argue with the need for a seminar and program which would in any way reduce the number of falls that our seniors experience each year. Try as we might, we will never prevent them all from occurring. If our seniors are to have independence, and we would like many of them to have independence and live on their own, then this is going to be an unfortunate result of that. So I am with the government with regard to providing this education to prevent more falls occurring.

However, I want to say to the minister opposite that when we passed the smoking issue, there was no allowance made for people who are in long-term-care facilities, to provide those people who had been smoking for 50 or 60 years, and who will die smoking, with adequate facilities where they could smoke cigarettes in the remaining last years of their lives. When these people are forced into the cold and into the winter, there will be some falls as a result of that. I invite the—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Responses.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): My response is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Dalton McGuinty gave Ontarians a written promise to update the Endangered Species Act during the 2003 election. Over three years later, the Minister of Natural Resources is saying that he proposes to get around to it next year. Dalton McGuinty promised an updated act that includes scientific listing for endangered species, as well as protection for the habitat of endangered species.

Ontarians want endangered species habitat protected. They want to know that crucial habitat protection will be central in any legislation brought before this House. They also want to see provisions in an Endangered Species Act that ensures funding for species recovery plans. As we've seen with so much of this government's legislation, such as the Clean Water Act, the implementation funding to make the act work on the ground is nowhere in sight. If endangered species legislation is ever introduced, New Democrats will be working to ensure it contains the scientific listing, the habitat protection and the implementation funding Dalton McGuinty promised and Ontarians expect.

The irony of the minister making the statement today is also not lost on New Democrats. It was a week ago today that we learned about this minister being party to a decision made by the cabinet to permit the expansion of the Milton quarry on the Niagara Escarpment, the spine of the greenbelt. Part of the purpose of having a greenbelt

is to protect and preserve ecosystems and habitats that are homes to endangered species. For years, this government has been warned—warned repeatedly—that this expansion will negatively impact on the Jefferson salamander, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, as well as the butternut tree, which is an endangered species under the provincial act.

The minister being part of the decision to permit the quarry expansion offers a preview of the extent to which the legislation he puts forward will actually protect endangered species: probably not much.

FALLS PREVENTION

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I want to respond to the statement made by the minister responsible for seniors and agree with him that falls among seniors are a very serious issue. If you look at this report that was released in 2006, *The Economic Burden of Injury in Ontario*, in the section under "The Cost of a Silent Epidemic" it says with respect to seniors:

"In 1999, unintentional falls cost Ontarians \$1.9 billion, with \$927 million attributed to the direct costs of falls among those 55+ years of age.... It is estimated that about 40% of falls leading to hospitalization are the result of hip fractures. This statistic becomes even more alarming when one considers that the proportion of Ontarians aged 65 and older will nearly double from 13% of the total population in 2004 to 24% in 2031."

So it is clear that any efforts that can be made to reduce falls among seniors are efforts that need to be focused and enhanced and worked towards.

But I want to also say that, because the minister in his press release today referenced grants that have been previously made to organizations working to prevent elder abuse, I am compelled to make this point. On June 15, the government and its community partners unveiled publicly three of the ads on World Elder Abuse Day. The ads focused on elder abuse: what it is, how to recognize it, that abuse of 64,000 seniors in Ontario is a crime and that it can't be tolerated in Ontario. I saw the three ads with the minister on October 19, when we celebrated elder abuse day here in Ontario, and I can say that those ads are very powerful, very compelling and, frankly, they're very shocking.

The problem is that most Ontarians are never going to see the ads because they were done as public service announcements. OMNI has taken it upon itself to run the ads. They've taken it upon themselves to even dub over the English in a number of other languages. But this should be the responsibility of the government. It should be the government giving the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse the money to translate the ads into French so they're relevant as well in my part of the world, and in Ottawa, and into other languages here in the GTA and Toronto that would be more relevant to the ethnic communities. So I encourage the minister to do that.

Most importantly, though, I think the government really has to cough up the money to make sure that these

ads play on television. I note that the government has lots of money for ads for wait times and for education etc., but where is the money to put these ads on television so that people can see first-hand how serious elder abuse is? I'm sure the minister has lobbied the Minister of Finance very hard for these funds, and I would ask him to redouble his efforts here today to make sure that he can get government money to get these ads on television.

VISITORS

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion):

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I am very pleased that, this session, Ottawa West–Nepean has had a page, Philip Lee. Philip's mother, Lily Yip, is in the gallery up above, and his brother, Robert Lee, is with us. We welcome them to the Legislature.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In the members' east gallery today, I would like to introduce Paul and Linda Jobe from the riding of Peterborough. They were successful winners at a United Way auction to have lunch with their MPP, and they're here from Peterborough today. Paul and Linda, just stand up for the members here. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Health. Last week, the Auditor General released his report, in which he called the wait times data put forth by the McGuinty Liberals "misleading" and that the McGuinty Liberal wait time data need to be "taken with a grain of salt," to quote the Auditor General.

Given that it was on the basis of these data, which have been found to be misleading and to be taken with a grain of salt by the Auditor General, the very same data upon which the McGuinty Liberals ran their \$2-million ad campaign this past fall about wait times, I want to ask the Minister of Health whether or not he still stands by the accuracy of those ads.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think it's very, very important to note that the auditor himself, whom you have attributed quotes to, approved those ads. It's an important part of the law that was brought in by our government following the last election, so I think that's an important point in the matter.

I would like the honourable member to know two other things. The Auditor General's reporting was based on a lot of stuff that was happening around May of last year. Subsequent to that, you asked questions in this Legislature about presentation and made the suggestion that we should be presenting on the basis of the 90th percentile rather than the average. At that time, we did

make the adjustment to our website because we felt that that was a presentation that made more sense to more people, which was frankly the good advice that you offered to us. Our website alteration occurred at that time on the basis of the information that you offered. So, yes, we very much stand by those ads. We respect the view that he has brought forward, and in supplementary I'll give you some more information on what we've done in response to the Auditor General's efforts.

Mr. Tory: I'll certainly look forward to that, but the fact is that the ads are based on data that the Auditor General himself called "misleading" and said should be "taken with a grain of salt."

Since October, we have been stating that the ads made claims that couldn't be supported by the facts; namely, that by calling the phone number cited in the ads you could reduce your wait time. So we called that phone number, as we've said many times in this House, and were told that this was not possible, that you couldn't call the phone number and get your wait time reduced.

I will ask the minister again: In the face of the points we've raised in this House and now in the face of the criticisms the Auditor General has raised and which you have responded to by appointing someone to look into them—so, obviously, you take those seriously—do you believe those ads, based on those numbers that he found misleading, were accurate and that the \$2 million of taxpayers' money was spent putting forward accurate information to the taxpayers?

1410

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: As I said to the honourable member in the earlier answer, yes, very much so. Wait times are down in the province of Ontario.

There is an issue that the Auditor General has brought forward about the best way to measure and present. I think it's very important in this place that we not undermine the work that has been done by all of the best experts. We're pioneers in the province of Ontario related to the posting of this type of information. We asked 25 experts in the subjects of MRI and CT to give us the best advice that they could about the way to measure and present that information, and that's what we did.

Subsequently, the Auditor General gave us some different advice. What we've done, which we think is prudent, is we've asked Senator Kirby, who's pretty distinguished around health issues, to come in, take a look at the way we've been doing it and give us his best advice early in the new year about whether there are alterations that should be made. Accordingly, as we said from the very first, if good advice is on offer to us, we'll take a look at it. The honourable member himself has helped to amend the way that we present this information on the basis of questions that he brought to the floor of this Legislature last year.

Mr. Tory: What we're really after here is—the Auditor General has commented on the data; we're talking about the ads done by your good friends over at Bensimon Byrne.

We have a letter dated December 5, 2006, from Advertising Standards Canada. They issued a letter in response to a complaint about these print and television ads. That letter says the following: "In council's opinion, the advertising in question raised expectations that remained unsatisfied after reading or hearing the information found in the website or helpline [to] which readers/viewers of the advertisements were directed. Council, therefore, found that the newspaper and television advertisements made inaccurate claims and omitted relevant information, contrary to clauses 1(a) and (b) of the code."

These are people in Canada who are put in charge of monitoring advertisements so that when someone complains, they can determine whether it's accurate or inaccurate. They say it's inaccurate and that it contains data that misleads people.

My question is this: It's now not just the auditor; it's not just us; it's the Advertising Standards Council who said you spent \$2 million of taxpayers' money running ads that contained inaccurate claims—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I have no difficulty doing so on the points that I've already raised. Firstly, anyone who studies the subject or intuitively speaks to anybody knows that wait times are down in the province of Ontario. No one makes claims that the whole situation is licked, but there's no doubt whatsoever that wait times are down. If your member was here from Barrie, you could simply turn around and ask him, "Was the Barrie Examiner wrong in October when it ran an editorial that said, 'Previously, it took about 54 weeks to receive an MRI locally, the longest in Ontario, but that period has been reduced to 7 weeks?'" Wait times are down; that's the point that has been made.

The Auditor General himself approved the very ads that the honourable member is now complaining about. The reality is that an investment of \$600 million of the people's money contributed in a variety of areas all across the province to reductions in wait times. Now we're going to ask Senator Kirby to give us some advice based on what we heard from the Auditor General about whether there is a better way to present the information. I think that'll be a report that will benefit all of those who wish to participate in the debate about wait times in Ontario.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Tory: My question again is to the Minister of Health. We see him at his worst today, because what we have here now is the Auditor General saying that we have data on the website that is "misleading" and should be "taken with a grain of salt." We now have the body that you seem so apparently able to dismiss, the Advertising Standards Council of Canada, the independent organization that is charged with the responsibility of monitoring and adjudicating upon ads as to whether they're accurate or not, and they have said that these ads that you spent \$2 million on and defended day after day

in this House contained inaccurate information that should not have been in front of people at the time they saw them. In fact, they go on to say, "The advertising in question raised expectations that remained unsatisfied after reading or hearing the information found in the website or helpline [to] which readers/viewers of the advertisements were directed." That is a very clear finding that they have about an inaccurate ad, which, by the way, they have communicated to your government.

My question is this: Are you prepared to get up in light of that independent finding and the Auditor General's comments and retract those ads and apologize for misleading the people of Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: No, not at all. In fact—

The Speaker: Order. I need the Leader of the Opposition to rephrase the last part of his question.

Mr. Tory: It's great to have a chance to ask it again: Will the minister agree to apologize and retract these ads, that have been found inaccurate and omitting vital information to the public of Ontario, on which he spent \$2 million of the taxpayers' money?

The Speaker: Yes, you're right, and you will withdraw the offending word.

Mr. Tory: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: A few things that I think are important. Firstly, the honourable member wants me to apologize, but I say, with respect, our Premier ran in 2003 on an initiative to reduce wait times. He worked through the Council of the Federation leading up to a conference in September 2004 which brought the whole country together and has brought serious new resource to this issue. We brought together the best experts in our province—

Mr. John Yakubuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Just apologize and withdraw.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: You should be doing so. We brought the very best experts together and we asked them to give us advice, and we've been moving forward on that basis. The reality is that we've increased access to MRIs in the province of Ontario by 78%. So for the honourable member to stand in his place and pretend that that hasn't produced a result or to ignore the circumstances in Barrie asks me to wonder whether he shouldn't apologize for undermining the good work of people on the front lines in health care who have made a discernible difference to the people of Ontario. Wait times are down. There's more work to do, and we're looking forward to getting on with it.

Mr. Tory: The minister, of course, absolutely refuses to deal with the issue that I'm raising here, which is advertisements paid for with the taxpayers' money done by his good friends at Bensimon Byrne, which have been found by an independent organization, the Advertising Standards Council, to omit relevant information. They are quoted as follows:

"The general impression and message conveyed by the advertising, in council's view, was that wait times for all hospital procedures have already been reduced; that

Ontarians are now spending less time awaiting needed procedures; and that upon visiting the website or information line, respondents will be told how to further reduce their wait times.”

That is what they found to be inaccurate as a claim in the ads and that omitted relevant information. It's not about what you have to say about the data; the Auditor General has already commented on that. What I've asked you is, in light of this finding by the independent body that your ads omitted relevant information, and in light of the additional finding that they're accurate, will you get up and apologize for those ads spending \$2 million of the taxpayers' money and retract what they claim, which has been found to be inaccurate? Will you do it?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Here again, firstly, the honourable member wants me to be accurate, but in his statement two or three times now he's said that Bensimon Byrne did those ads. He's not even up to date and relevant enough to know that publicists did those ads, not Bensimon Byrne. But the greater point here is that the content of the ads themselves was approved by the Auditor General. That's what the law in Ontario says, as a result of the efforts that we have been involved in.

What people all across the province of Ontario know is that we worked hard to reduce wait times. The wait times strategy has been about five areas associated with a high degree of disability. Everyone in Ontario who's followed the discussion—Ruth Collins-Nakai, president of the Canadian Medical Association: “Ontario has moved from being a laggard to being a leader in the field of wait time management.” The point is, aligned all across the health care system professionals have dedicated themselves to the reduction of wait times. Wait times are down in a wide variety of areas. There is more work to do, and we look forward to getting on and applying all the lessons we've learned to date to reduce the wait times even further for the people of Ontario.

Mr. Tory: The very same auditor the minister refers to who found the wait time data misleading does not review the veracity of the ads; he only looks at whether they're partisan or not. What the Advertising Standards Council has clearly found is that those ads were inaccurate and omitted relevant information. That's what they found.

You named some names. Let me name some names: Paul Katz, Gary McGregor, Brenda Bailey, Mary Jane Fisher, Millie Downing. These are some of the people we have brought to this House who have been waiting exceptionally long periods of time to get necessary medical care in this province. These are people you were marketing with this data that the Auditor General calls misleading and ads that the Advertising Standards Council calls inaccurate and omitting relevant information.

They deserve an apology from you because you ran ads with \$2 million of the taxpayers' money saying, “Just call this line or go to this website and your wait time will magically disappear or be reduced.” Will you stand in your place, in light of this finding of the advertising standards council, and apologize for running these ads at

taxpayers' expense that are found to be inaccurate and omitting relevant information? Will you have the courage to do that?

Mr. Yakabuski: You lack the courage.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Well, you know what? You're lacking a question at the moment. But I think what the honourable member really is having a struggle with is, he's having a hard time respecting the fact—

Mr. Yakabuski: You're certainly lacking the answer, brother.

1420

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I think the bar got opened early here.

I think what's clear is that the honourable member opposite prefers to come into this place and talk about ads, but what he is doing also is undermining the fact that across the front lines of health care, dedicated individuals have been working hard to reduce wait times. Six hundred million dollars have been invested to produce 657,000 additional procedures. In Barrie, we know that the wait time for MRIs has been reduced from over one year to six or seven weeks.

The point is that people in Ontario know that wait times are down, and they know as well that there are other areas where there is more work to be done. No one pretends about that. It's only the honourable member who thinks that all solutions can be resolved on the one hand through a signature and on the other hand through a \$2.4-billion cut to health care.

MEMBERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Deputy Premier: In Ontario today, too many working families are being forced to work longer and harder for less. Meanwhile, under the McGuinty government, those who have high incomes are seeing salary increases like never before. In the last four years under the McGuinty government, the pay for the chair of the Ontario Energy Board has tripled, the pay for the top dog at Ontario Power Generation has doubled, and the pay for the top dog at Hydro One climbed so high that he lost track of his expenses and lost his job.

Now the McGuinty government has decided that the number one public policy issue is to increase MPPs' pay by 31%. My question is this: Why does the McGuinty government believe that it's good public policy to increase salaries at the top?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): When a question comes from the central figure in millionaires' row I think it deserves and warrants just a little further examination than what the honourable member is prepared to put on the table.

The honourable member, I'm sure, in discussions with the caucus members who sit behind him that he's prepared to undervalue on a daily basis—they're not in the same circumstance that he's in. They're not sitting in a circumstance where an honourable member who asked

the question has received a very, very substantial commitment already to his future circumstances.

The honourable member makes the allegation that this is the only issue, that this is a priority. To the contrary: We've been working vigorously in this Legislature—in fact, all members have—to move forward on a number of fronts. We are capable of doing such.

Last night, Marilyn Churley, a former member who used to sit in the front row alongside that honourable member, had something to say about this. I'll look forward to bringing that to everybody's attention in supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, I talk to a lot of ordinary folks every day. I talk to people in coffee shops, I talk to them in hockey rinks and I talk to them on the street. No one I talk to believes that MPPs in Ontario are underpaid. While you consider increasing MPPs' salaries by 31%, the number one public policy issue, legislative bills that would raise the minimum wage languish, legislative bills that would help firefighters suffering from cancer aren't dealt with, legislative bills that would warn families about dangerous chemicals in their homes are not dealt with and legislative bills that would protect nurses on the job aren't dealt with.

My question is this: Can you explain why firefighters, nurses and low-income working people have to wait while the McGuinty government makes a 31% pay increase for MPPs the number one priority?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: It's very good that the honourable member has come into the House and given the ironclad assurance that he's going to exempt himself from it once and forever, just like his friend from Niagara.

Here's what Marilyn Churley said: "I think there are reasonable grounds, and have been for some time, for a salary increase, I really do, when you compare it to other jurisdictions, federally in particular, and in this case it was the Integrity Commissioner who did a study. But I do agree ... that there should be a salary increase.... It has been going on for years and years and years where there has been no increase whatsoever, and I do know that MPPs do work very hard."

So I don't know how it is that you turn around and look in good conscience at a person like Gilles Bisson and say to him, "You're worth 60% of Charlie Angus's salary and not 25% of his pensionable benefits." I know Olivia Chow and I know Rosario Marchese, and I don't believe that they should be undervalued in the way the party leader offers to them in support. So I look forward to you—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: I have received literally hundreds of letters, e-mails, faxes and phone calls now—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Minister of Energy.

I need to be able to hear the leader of the third party place his question. When I sit down, I don't want to be hearing other people speaking. Thank you.

The leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: As I said, I've received literally hundreds of e-mails, faxes, phone calls and letters from ordinary people who are quite opposed to what the McGuinty government now proposes to do. All of them make the point that they heard Dalton McGuinty make literally hundreds of promises before the last election, most of which he has now broken. But the one thing they can't remember is Dalton McGuinty promising that he was going to raise his own salary by 31%. So what they're asking is, will Dalton McGuinty delay this 31% pay hike until after the next election so that those people who heard all the other promises will have a chance to hear this promise and decide on it? Will you do that, Deputy Premier?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member started his question by saying, "I have received." Oh yes, indeed he has received. Let's go back to the story about what he received: "Pensions All in the Family."

"It was a very rich buyout," Hampton, MPP for Rainy River, said at Queen's Park yesterday....

"Hampton confirmed receiving \$500,000, before tax, as his share of the \$109-million bill to abolish the gold-plated ... pension plan."

The member beside him to his right received \$200,000. In relatively the same period of time in this Legislature, the member for Niagara Centre received a payout of \$200,000. In the same period of service, relatively speaking, I have received for my pensionable time \$39,000.

This is the kind of outrage that comes manufactured on their basis. I encourage them to stand in their place today and make the firm commitment that they seem to be suggesting, which is that they will opt out, if that is the principle upon which they're prepared to stand.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Deputy Premier: What is clear is that working families will foot the bill for the McGuinty government's 31% pay hike. But before you ram it through, which is what this exercise is now all about for the McGuinty government, I think you should hear people out, like this woman from Niagara Falls who wrote: "My husband was just let go from his job in the automotive sector, and I am getting only a 2.3% increase this year. How do you justify a 25% increase? I am 100% against this increase."

Deputy Premier, why don't you and the Premier come with me to Niagara so you can meet some of these laid-off workers, look them in the eye, and explain why the McGuinty government considers a 31% pay increase for MPPs to be the number one public policy priority?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I think the Hamilton Spectator today, for anyone who hasn't had a chance to see the editorial cartoon entitled "NDP Leader Howard

Hampton Is Outraged,” has caught the man well in their sights, and I recommend it to everyone.

Here are the things that the NDP has stood against in our period of office: insulin pumps for diabetic kids—they voted against it; lowering auto insurance rates—they voted against it; ending 60-hour workweeks—they voted against it; ending mandatory retirement—they voted against it; 15,000 new affordable child care spaces—they voted against it; ending the national child benefit claw-back going forward—they voted against it; raising rates for those on social assistance—they voted against it; and raising rates for those on ODSP—they voted against it.

1430

The point is that this Legislature and the members here work very, very hard, and the honourable member stands in his place and says to his caucus, with his back turned on them, “You’re not worth it. We undervalue you. You’re not worth even 75% of the rate of compensation that a federal member makes for representation of the exact, same territory”—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. We can’t go on this way. Let’s restrain ourselves on all sides. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Deputy Premier, across northwestern Ontario, the misguided McGuinty policy of driving hydro rates through the roof has destroyed literally thousands of good-paying jobs in the forest sector. Why don’t you and the Premier come and meet Jim Gamble from Thunder Bay, who writes, “With your new-found raise of 25%, what is it you will say to all those northwestern Ontario workers who have lost their good-paying jobs and benefits at Bowater and other paper mills which have closed?”

I’d simply say this: Before you ram through this 31% pay hike for MPPs, why don’t you come to Thunder Bay and other northern Ontario communities and talk to those people whose jobs the McGuinty government has in fact destroyed and ask them if a 31% pay increase—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I hope the honourable member, when he has his meeting, will take his friend Jack Layton, because here’s what happened. On November 24, 2005, the government of Canada under Paul Martin announced a forestry competitive package worth \$1.5 billion, including a loan insurance program of up to \$800 million, as well as \$581 million in funding to support forest-dependent communities, market diversification and incentives for innovation in the forest industry. Although the NDP repeatedly called on the Liberal government to help the forestry industry, just four days later they joined forces with the Conservatives to bring down the government and force an unnecessary Christmas election. This action resulted in the forestry competitiveness program being put on the shelf for the election period and the subsequent cancellation of the program by the new Conservative government. Your own hands are on this, and those of your unified NDP are

very, very dirty indeed. The good people of northern Ontario are on to you.

Mr. Hampton: I think the precipitating event of that election was literally dozens of Liberals once again caught with their fingers in the public purse, some of whom are now going to jail.

Dalton McGuinty’s 31% pay hike is out of touch with the reality that working families across this province are feeling. I want to give an example of one woman from Toronto who works hard for the minimum wage. She writes, “At this point I have enough to pay my rent next month, but I can’t afford new glasses, I can’t afford to have my wisdom teeth removed, I can’t afford to get Christmas presents for my family and I’m not happy to hear that McGuinty is getting another \$39,000 a year.”

Minister, there are literally hundreds of thousands of people in this province who have less income, who are struggling harder than ever. Can you explain to them why you are so intent on ramming this legislation through the Legislature without ever hearing from them, without ever giving them an opportunity to cast an opinion? Why is this suddenly the number one public policy issue for the McGuinty government, and you don’t care to hear from those ordinary working people who are working longer and harder for less?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Maybe in the NDP the ram works that slowly. He offers the suggestion that there is some ramming going on, but the reality is that the bill hasn’t even been brought forward for discussion.

I want to say to my honourable friend, on the issue that the millionaires’ row is blushing pretty good so far: I want to send you my Standard Life report, which shows the net value of my account at \$39,010.79

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I’m prepared to put this in the public domain; no problem. Then you could do us all the favour of letting us know how your half a million has rested over these last years and how your conscience is resting and how you’re prepared to pretend your way through this circumstance and be so dishonest and devalue so forwardly the circumstances from your caucus members. Why is it that the honourable member is unprepared to acknowledge that it’s appropriate that we should—

The Speaker: Minister, I need you to withdraw—

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I withdraw.

The Speaker: Withdrawn. New question.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I want to keep the Minister of Health busy. I want to have one more go at this business of the advertisements, because I don’t think the minister has carefully taken into account what this is, which is a response from the independent body that looks after advertising in Canada and is a self-regulating process of the industry. The complaint was brought to the attention of the government, so they had a chance to put their opinions in front of this body, as did

the complainant. And this body has found that the advertisements on which you spent millions of dollars of taxpayers' money—they said that these ads “made inaccurate claims and omitted relevant information, contrary to clauses 1(a) and (b).” It goes on to say that the council is pleased to learn that the advertisement was no longer being published and would not be published again in the future.

I ask you again, in light of this finding by an independent body that these ads were inaccurate and omitted relevant information, will you stand up and acknowledge this ruling, apologize for the fact that the government funded an ad that is inaccurate and omitted relevant information, and retract the ad and publish a retraction? Why won't you do that?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think I've answered the question pretty much by now, but I'm happy to take as many more licks at it as the honourable member brings. But since he's going to be up on his feet on this issue, maybe the next time he stands up he can remind us of the strategy that he deployed after he unleashed personal attack ads on a gentleman about to be the Prime Minister of Canada that made fun of a disability. Because that's on your track record, sir, on the subject of advertising. That's your personal involvement in advertising.

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: It rankles the one from Ottawa; not surprising. But she really needs to look a little more into the history of her leader on these matters.

As a result of our actions, nearly half a million more people have access to a primary care physician in Ontario. The wait for those people is over. They've gained access to those services. Through the investment of \$600 million, wait times in a wide variety of other areas have been reduced. In Barrie, Ontario, an MRI no longer takes a year but has been reduced to a small number of weeks. We have made good progress. There's more work—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tory: It's interesting, because—and I don't know, quite frankly, whether it's the politically correct thing to say in here or not, but in connection with that particular incident, in which there was a long story that lay behind it, what I did do was I said that because I was a co-chair of that campaign, I accepted responsibility for what happened. That is all that I'm asking you to do as the Minister of Health and the Deputy Premier in the province of Ontario.

In light of the finding by an independent body that you aired ads that had inaccurate information and that omitted relevant information and that they have found to be ads that should not have been published and should not be published again, I'm asking you to do the same thing, which is to stand up in your place and accept responsibility, apologize to the public and say that it won't happen again and that you're going to retract those ads. I'm asking you to do the same thing. Why can't you do it?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I take full and complete responsibility for working alongside the Premier to reduce wait times in the province of Ontario, because that is what the record indicates; no doubt whatsoever.

In accordance with the views that have been brought forward by the auditor long before a letter that I haven't even had the privilege of seeing yet, but from the auditor's work of last week, we asked Senator Kirby, who's pretty good at making reports related to health care, who's a well-recognized figure, to take a look at what the best experts have told us is the measurement system and the way that it's reported. I've already said to the honourable member that we're going to get that done in very short order. Early in the new year we'll take a look at whether we can present the information in a way that is more helpful to people.

At the heart of it, the honourable member wants to leave the illusion that wait times are not reduced. Indeed, they are. That's well-known by everyone who has taken a close look at it, and accordingly, we'll continue to work to reduce wait times, to the benefit of the people of the province of Ontario.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Deputy Premier. Today the Pembina Institute released a major report that presents compelling technical evidence that the McGuinty government and the nuclear industry are lowballing the cost of your nuclear mega scheme. For example, the report says that managing radioactive fuel from existing reactors alone will cost \$24 billion, but that number is not included in the McGuinty government's cost projections for your \$40-billion nuclear scheme. That's \$24 billion to store the waste from reactors that already exist.

1440

My question is this: Why is the McGuinty government lowballing nuclear costs? And can you tell the people of Ontario how much more money it will cost to store the nuclear waste that will be produced as a result of your \$40-billion nuclear mega scheme?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): First of all, the Ontario Power Authority has identified potential costs associated with the development of nuclear power. There are a number of variables that will go into that. We don't concur with those conclusions.

We have established processes that will look very carefully at a number of these issues, including the storage of nuclear waste subsequent to the development of the additional nuclear capacity and the refurbishment of existing capacity. The bottom line is that we've begun that analysis. These decisions will continue through both an environmental assessment process and a licensing process. For the member opposite or any group to suggest that they can conclude with certainty around a range of

these issues is frankly not—it has to be dealt with in a broader context.

The bottom line is that we don't concur with those estimates. There are a number of estimates out there that we're looking at carefully. We will continue to examine them, both through the environmental assessment process—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: The fact is that nuclear power in Ontario has always had huge cost overruns. The people of Ontario were told that Darlington would cost \$4 billion. When it was finished, it was \$14 billion—a \$10-billion cost overrun. Now we have more of the same.

What the report also points out is that the cost of nuclear energy accounts for \$15 billion of the nearly \$20 billion of stranded debt. The huge costs of nuclear energy are not limited to the costs of building the plants. There are numerous extra costs associated with the storage of nuclear fuel, nuclear safety and the creation of new transmission lines.

Why does the McGuinty government want to repeat this very expensive history in Ontario in your nuclear mega scheme? Why do you want to saddle hydro consumers with a nuclear mega scheme that's going to cost far more than \$40 billion and drive hydro rates up even more?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The leader of the third party is simply inventing those numbers. They're not rooted in reality. I would invite him to have a look at a range of cost estimates that have been provided to the government, to the Legislature, as we embark on this discussion about nuclear power in Ontario.

Nuclear power has been with us for 40 years in Ontario. In fact, under the IPSP, we will see nuclear power's percentage of our total generating capacity decline over the next 20 years. There is no doubt that there's been something of a checkered history in terms of cost related to the development of nuclear power, but there's one government that's brought a nuclear project in on time and on budget, and that is the McGuinty government. Pickering A, unit 1—on time and on budget. This government will manage this file.

There are enormous challenges, but nuclear power has been part of our history and will continue to be. We simply don't agree with the leader of the third party.

ONTARIO ARTISTS

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Culture. Minister, as you know, my riding of Perth–Middlesex is home to many artists. My hometown of Stratford is known as a cultural jewel around the world, and my community is very fortunate to be able to enjoy the fruits of the labours of these talented individuals, actors, artisans, dancers, musicians and visual artists.

We know in my riding, I believe more keenly than in others, that the quality of our lives and the vibrancy of

our economy in the 21st century will be determined in large part by the contribution our artists make to our society. Minister, can you please tell me what our government is doing to ensure that artists in this province have the opportunity to thrive?

Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture): I want to thank the member from Perth–Middlesex for his tireless advocacy for the arts in his community.

We support our artists in many ways, particularly by creating an environment in Ontario where artists, arts and culture can thrive. For example, earlier this month I was in Ottawa and made a presentation to the CRTC. Why? To advocate on behalf of artists and creators. It was the first time in 20 years that a delegation from the ministry responsible for culture actually appeared at those hearings, and possibly the first time in history that a minister herself made a presentation.

We flow \$40 million annually to the Ontario Arts Council. This agency of my ministry benefits 1,300 individuals and 800 organizations. There are many more examples that I will provide in my supplementary.

Mr. Wilkinson: It's reassuring to know that our artists are finally being valued, after eight years of being treated as a burden on society by the previous government.

While individuals are of course the lifeblood of Ontario's cultural sector, I have been told by my constituents that in order to thrive, artists cannot do it in isolation. They need to share ideas, they need forums to display talents and they need to come up with creative ways to enrich the lives of all Ontarians. This government's direct support to individual artists is very important in my riding and right across Ontario, but beyond this, how are we creating the conditions within which these individuals can create and thrive?

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: I'm very happy to report that we do indeed have a comprehensive support strategy for the arts sector, and it's based on creating the environment I spoke about. We have just launched a \$7.5-million entertainment and creative cluster partnership fund that will help businesses with an arts focus to become the most innovative in the world.

Since coming to office, we have been actively working with municipalities to help them recognize the cultural and economic benefits of arts, and we are helping them to develop their own municipal cultural planning.

I'm excited about our recent initiative to promote Ontario's culture abroad. In January, my ministry and several key stakeholders will participate in a business mission in India, one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

I want to mention that right here in Toronto, we're supporting the city's first-ever international arts festival, Luminato, which will highlight artists and products from across the province.

LANDFILL

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Almost a

year ago, Waste Management Corp. began the process of applying for a massive expansion of their landfill site at Carp Road in the west part of the city of Ottawa. The draft terms of reference were released and commented on, but the revised terms of reference have not been filed with your ministry because Waste Management is out of compliance with their existing landfill site.

One of the main offences of the site is groundwater contamination of adjacent property. What did Waste Management do to meet the regulation? Did they clean up the leachate? No. They simply bought the land beside them so they could continue to pollute the groundwater. Minister, will you make them clean up this existing mess before you consider any terms of reference for an environmental assessment to expand this quagmire?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I know that my friend opposite has some understanding of the importance of the environmental assessment process, and that is what is taking place in the context of a request by Waste Management to expand the Carp landfill. The critical issue that my friend raises is with respect to the leachate, and that issue must and will be addressed in the context of the environmental assessment that will take place, as I fulfill the responsibility to ensure that if this landfill is to be expanded, it will be done only if I can be assured that the communities surrounding that landfill will be safe and secure.

1450

Mr. Sterling: We want the leachate cleaned up; we just don't want it there forever.

Madam Minister, our community is gagging on the odours that emanate from this site. The stench has increased in intensity and frequency and is migrating farther afield than ever before, even in the cooler weather. The community has been told by your ministry that during 2006 the company has been in a "voluntary abatement program" to improve this crisis. The problem hasn't improved; it's worse. Your ministry contends that the odour is more of a nuisance than a health concern; however, my constituents don't agree.

How long do my constituents have to gag on this stinking mess? Will you shut down this site until the company deals with these obnoxious odours? Shut it down until they clean it up.

Hon. Ms. Broten: Thank you very much, and I can indicate to my friend opposite that the ministry is actively engaged with Waste Management and is well aware of the issues faced in that community. In fact, it was the Ministry of the Environment that refused to consider the agreement until the proponent addressed the issue, and they have taken several steps to address the odour problem. We have approved, at the Ministry of the Environment, those steps: A temporary gas flare. The company has also applied for approval for a misting system, which would be an odour neutralizer. As to the leachate system, this issue will be addressed in the context of the environmental assessment.

To update my friend with respect to the leachate, the company has installed a leachate control system, and that

is now being collected in the Ottawa sanitary sewer. The Ministry of the Environment is actively engaged, protecting the community, and all of these critical issues will be brought to light in the context of the very important environmental assessment that is now taking place.

ONTARIO ARTISTS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): My question is for the Minister of Culture. In the gallery today, we have stakeholders representing various professional artisans, cultural workers, associations—almost 30 this morning. They have been waiting two years for your report on the status of the artist and almost four years for status-of-the-artist legislation. The report was to lay the foundation for legislation that would improve the lives of Ontario artists in the areas of child performers, taxation, employment standards and collective bargaining.

Minister, when is this long-overdue report going to be released, and when are we going to see legislation that will truly improve the lives of Ontario's struggling artists and cultural workers?

Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture): It's really very difficult to respond seriously to someone who is part of a party that after five years in power did absolutely nothing on this file; absolutely nothing.

But having said that, artists are the centre of our creative society, and I want to acknowledge and thank the visitors who are here today. I know that artists reflect the best of who we are in our world, and I'm well aware of the challenges that they're facing. We do take it very seriously.

I'm working with a number of ministries, and I'm carefully looking to get this right. That's what I'm doing. We're not going to do what the NDP did, which was sit on reports for five years. And I would just like to convey to the third party that we have the best track record in this province when it comes to arts and culture.

Ms. DiNovo: Dalton McGuinty promised to bring in that legislation within two years. It's almost four years now. An example of the kinds of problems that require urgent action: Artists are not classified under the Employment Standards Act, so they're not privy to the standards that protect the rest of the workforce. We're just asking for that, Madam Minister of Culture. Answer them. The question is, will you immediately bring in status-of-the-artist legislation, like you promised?

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: We did have a review with the advisory council, as we said we would.

I want to also convey to this House that we have advocated strenuously in this province. We have created an environment. Just look around the city of Toronto, look around this province, at the investments that have been made when it comes to arts and culture. It is second to none. We are the envy of this country, if not other jurisdictions around the world, because of the work we are doing here. Not only that; we are taking our excellence in our arts and culture and we're promoting it around the world because it is something we're extremely proud of. Yes, we're going to continue. There's a

lot more to do because there has been a lot of rebuilding to do because of the inaction of the previous government on arts and culture. We understand it and we understand and value artists. We are going to do everything we have to do to create the best environment in this country, in Ontario, for artists.

ACCESSIBILITÉ POUR LES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

M^{me} Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): Ma question s'adresse à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires. Comme les membres de cette Chambre le savent, un Conseil consultatif des normes d'accessibilité a été formé en décembre 2005, avec un mandat de conseiller la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires sur l'élaboration de normes d'accessibilité et sur des programmes d'éducation sectoriels et au grand public à l'appui de la mise en oeuvre efficace de la Loi sur l'accessibilité pour les personnes handicapées de l'Ontario.

Ce conseil est composé de représentants du monde des affaires, d'organismes du secteur public et de personnes handicapées de tous les milieux. Ensemble, ils nous apportent une somme impressionnante de compétences et de connaissances.

Le conseil se compose de 13 hommes et femmes qui, au cours de la dernière année, ont joué un rôle crucial en aidant le gouvernement de l'Ontario à concrétiser sa vision d'une société accessible d'ici l'année 2025. Qui sont ces gens à qui nous devons fière chandelle?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur (ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones): Je voudrais premièrement remercier la députée de Nipissing, qui est une grande militante pour l'accessibilité en Ontario. En effet, nous avons souligné hier le premier anniversaire du Conseil consultatif des normes d'accessibilité.

Le conseil est présidé par M. David Onley. Comme beaucoup d'entre vous le savent bien, David est un journaliste chevronné de Citytv. Il compte à son actif de nombreuses années de bénévolat et de défense des droits des personnes handicapées. En 1997, David a été intronisé au Temple de la renommée Terry Fox pour ses contributions répétées à l'avancée de la cause des personnes handicapées.

David est épaulé par la vice-présidente du conseil, M^{me} Tracy MacCharles, de Pickering. Tracy a été membre de l'ancien conseil consultatif de l'accessibilité pour l'Ontario.

Les autres membres du conseil viennent de partout en province. Je veux aujourd'hui les remercier pour le travail exceptionnel qu'ils ont fait.

Ms. Smith: I'll take the advice of the Minister of Citizenship and be brief this time.

The majority of members of our council are people with disabilities. This is important because there is such a wealth of talent in the disability community, people who

stood by us as we developed the OADA, people who believe in the legislation and are committed to seeing it through.

The 2025 mark is not the beginning but an end point to the process of making Ontario fully accessible. Bearing that in mind, Minister, what steps have been taken by the council so far?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Over the past year, these dedicated individuals have donated their time, expertise and passion for breaking down barriers for people with disabilities. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank them on behalf of the Ontario government.

Key accomplishments of the council over the past year include meeting with chairs of both the customer service and transportation accessibility standard development committees to share preliminary ideas on the initial proposed standards, providing advice to the minister on the initial proposed customer service centre, and participating in focus groups on a proposed accessibility public education campaign. In addition, members were actively involved in community events to raise awareness of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, and of the barriers faced by people with disabilities. They are playing an instrumental role in helping the government to implement the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and we look forward to their continued advice and counsel as we move ahead.

1500

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, I'd like to ask you about an article in today's North Bay Nugget. I'll quote from the article:

"The Ontario Public Service Employees Union will hold bake sales today in North Bay, Timmins and Hearst, to help raise money for the cash-strapped Ministry of Natural Resources....

"MNR employees care about quality wildlife management and are at their wits' end after years of cuts that have left absolutely no room to trim any further."

In another article today, John Kerr tells us that as a result of your cuts in 2005, charges against violators dropped and fines fell by a whopping \$479,240, and worse is expected for 2006-07.

I've heard from people in northeastern Ontario who tell me that MNR vehicles have been parked since mid-October. I've also heard from MNR staff who are despondent.

Minister, do you think it's reasonable for employees to have bake sales to put gas in their cars? What's next: car washes and candy bar sales?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Well, we did a job there. I appreciate the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka's interest in the ministry, because I know he lives in an area where people love to hunt and fish, as I do, and have a special interest and pride in the ministry,

basically taking care of our wildlife across the province, and we take that pride as it extends to our compliance and enforcement also.

The member used a statistic that compared the amount of the fines one year over another. That's a very difficult and imprecise comparator, as you should be looking at the number of convictions year to year. The fines can vary, depending on the crime, the severity of the crime and maybe the number of occurrences, but I think convictions would be a stronger comparator. Convictions are more or less the same, because basically we've spent more or less the same on that service.

Mr. Miller: In June, in response to my question about your broken promise to fully fund the fish and wildlife programs, you said that hunting licence fees were forecast to be declining. You said, "...we feel that with some of the decline in the purchases of hunting licences ... those revenues are projected to decline." You also said you were going to have to sit down with stakeholders and negotiate how to build up revenues in the special-purpose account.

Well, the actual figures for hunting licences contradict your June statement. Between 2003 and 2005, there have been significant increases in licences in almost every category: small game licences up 5%, deer up 14.9%, moose up 4.5%, bear up 13.6%, wild turkey up 47%, non-resident moose up 4.5%, non-resident deer up 69%. Licence sales are up, and that means more dollars for the special-purpose account, so where is this extra money being spent? Because it's not going into the fish and wildlife program.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: Obviously I'm doing a far better job than I predicted I could do in June, and I'm pleased with that. Really what it is is opening up more hunting opportunities, because we saw those projections, that with an aging population we needed to look at more hunting opportunities. That's what we've done, as the member knows, by extending the opening of Sunday hunting in southern Ontario. We've also been looking at more precise deer management, which means more opportunities. So we have been able to increase that funding. I work with my heritage hunting commission to see how else we can do this. They've come up with some good recommendations. As you know, we're going to have a Heritage Day next year. We're also looking at ways that we can increase the amount of money in the special-purpose account. As you know, all money that goes into that special-purpose account is dedicated to the management of wildlife.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): In the absence of the finance minister, my question is directed to the Deputy Premier today. Minister, there are 70 workers who have been walking picket lines in Hamilton. They've been on strike for about two months. Their employer is a democratic membership-based organization that's demanding major concessions from them. They

don't want to provide these women workers with full-time hours, they don't want to continue their pension plan contributions, and they want to roll back their sick benefits.

Deputy Premier, these women work for FirstOntario Credit Union, whose CEO boasts record profits. Do you think women workers should be treated this way?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): The honourable member knows very well that as government we have had a very good track record at seeing collective agreements solved in this province; over 97% have been solved.

As well, the honourable member should be aware that it is the responsibility of the employer and the union to resolve their differences at the bargaining table. It's our hope, as always, that both parties will make every effort to conclude a new agreement.

The Ministry of Labour is certainly in a position and prepared at all times to offer mediation assistance to parties at the bargaining table. This assistance is available upon request.

Ms. Horwath: Back to the Deputy Premier: The bottom line is, I am actually a member of that democratic organization, and I planned to attend the FirstOntario Credit Union's annual general meeting, which was supposed to be held December 6. But in order to do that, they had to actually hold the meeting. Many members were waiting to go to that meeting to hold that board accountable and ask them questions about the strike. But I couldn't go because the finance ministry officials at FSCO gave the board permission to postpone their AGM.

Your ministry's meddling interfered with the democratic rights of the membership, prolonged the strike and has done serious damage to the cause of these women workers. Will you rein in your financial services regulator and ensure it stays out of labour relations matters that are clearly beyond its mandate?

Hon. Mr. Peters: It always strikes me, as the member for Hamilton East stands up and professes to advocate for workers in this province—perhaps at some point she can explain to workers and working families in this province why she and her party voted against ending mandatory retirement in this province, voted against ending the 60-hour workweek.

The honourable member should understand that the importance of collective bargaining is that we want both parties sitting at that table to work out their differences. It would be inappropriate for any member of this Legislature to interfere in that collective bargaining process.

Again, the Ministry of Labour always has mediators available. We're ready and willing to come in and provide assistance to both parties.

EDUCATION LEGISLATION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I've got a question for the Minister of Education today. Minister, students in Ontario claimed victory this week as the House passed Bill 52, learning to 18. The new law

requires all students to continue learning till age 18 or till graduation. It gives students more choice in programs that are offered to match their own skills, interests and goals. Bill 52 was introduced exactly one year ago. We held various public meetings on the issue, and we listened to the concerns. The Tories put partisan politics ahead of the interests of students and voted against Bill 52. Let's not forget the NDP, who offered no solutions and didn't bring forward one amendment to the bill.

Unlike the Tories and the NDP, the McGuinty Liberals have not turned their backs on students. Please tell this House how this bill will improve the success of students in this province.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): Thank you to the member for Oakville. I'm really proud to be part of a government—the McGuinty government—that has been willing to look at the school-leaving age for the first time since 1954 and recognizes that the conditions in 2006 are very different than the conditions in 1954.

I want to thank all the education partners and the parents and students who came to the committee and brought suggestions for amendments. My parliamentary assistant, Ted McMeekin, listened very well and then came forward and made sure that the amendments we put in place strengthened the legislation.

Only principals will be allowed to issue credits for learning outside the classroom; we've allowed courts to suspend drivers' licences as a last resort; and we've made sure that programs like the one in Oakville at St. Ignatius of Loyola, which is part of the Halton Catholic District School Board—it offers a program called the expansion of e-learning in a credit recovery classroom. This kind of pilot project will inform the kinds of programs that we're going to be putting in place going forward that are going to keep students in school. Six thousand more students graduated last year than the year before. That's what this program is about.

1510

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 37(a), I wish to advise you of my dissatisfaction with the response of the Minister of the Environment to my question about the Carp dump.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. You may file that with the table.

PETITIONS

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): This is the last of 2,200 individual signatures to support a school in south Nepean.

"Whereas Longfields and Davidson Heights in south Nepean are some of the fastest-growing communities in Ottawa and Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has voted to authorize the final design phases for a grade 7 to 12 school to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario has lifted a three-year moratorium on school closings in order to make way for new educational facilities;

"We, residents of Nepean-Carleton, petition the Parliament of Ontario to ensure that the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board continues with plans to build a new grade 7 to 12 school no later than autumn of 2008 to serve the Longfields and Davidson Heights communities."

I wholeheartedly support this petition and I affix my signature.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

"Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

"Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people's complaints about children's aid societies' decisions; and

"Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman's office;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies (CAS)."

I agree with this petition. I sign it and send it to the table by way of page Simon.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I keep getting petitions from the Consumer Federation of Canada. This petition reads as follows:

"To the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services:

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

"Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

"Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

"We, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature on December 8, 2005, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information such as SIN and credit card numbers" and others.

"(2) Should a credit bureau discover that there has been a breach of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the victimized consumer.

"(3) Credit bureaus should only report inquiries resulting out of actual applications for credit and for no other reasons.

"(4) Credit bureaus should investigate any complaints within 30 days and correct or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed or inaccurate."

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to sign it.

LAND TITLES

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas, in the current environment of an escalating problem of title theft and mortgage fraud, property protections for homeowners are warranted and real measures are necessary to address real estate fraud; and

"Whereas MPP Joe Tascona's Restore the Deed Act, Bill 136, has passed second reading in the Legislature and has been referred to the standing committee on general government; and

"Whereas, among others, the Restore the Deed Act has four primary benefits:

"—Reduce the harm by ensuring that the person who is the rightful owner of the property keeps the property. The innocent buyer or the innocent lender must seek compensation from the land titles assurance fund, as is New Brunswick law;

"—Prevent the fraud by restricting access to registration of documents to licensed real estate professionals who carry liability insurance, by requiring notification statements and the freezing of the register, as is Saskatchewan law, and by establishing a system of 'no dealings' where landowners can mark their title, which can only be removed by them using a personal identification number prior to the property being transferred or mortgaged;

"—Access to the land titles assurance fund be reformed as a 'fund of first resort' and be operated by an arm's-length board of directors appointed by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, composed of a broad

representation of consumer, real estate industry and law enforcement groups;

"—Victims of fraud prior to the enactment of the Restore the Deed Act will be eligible to apply for compensation under the reformed land titles assurance fraud fund; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's proposed legislation will not get the job done;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to enact the measures to protect homeowners from having their homes stolen, as contained in MPP Joe Tascona's Restore the Deed Act."

I support the petition and sign it.

PEACE OFFICERS' MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for an Ontario Peace Officers' Memorial Day, and a memorial monument on Queen's Park (Bill 131):

"Whereas, Ontario peace officers have performed significant and heroic duties to protect the public for over 130 years; and

"Whereas, Ontario peace officers have been murdered, killed, or died in the 'line of duty'; and

"Whereas, federal peace officers have also been murdered, killed, or died in the 'line of duty' in Ontario; and

"Whereas, Bill 131"—my private member's bill—"would establish a Peace Officers' Memorial Day, and a permanent Ontario peace officers' monument on Queen's Park; and

"Whereas, Ontario peace officers are recognized nationally, along with police, at the police and peace officers' memorial on Parliament Hill in Ottawa; and

"Whereas, eight (8) other provinces have police and peace officers' memorials,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 131 that would create a Peace Officers' Memorial Day in Ontario, and a peace officers' memorial monument on"—or in or around the precinct of—"Queen's Park, where fallen officers' families, other peace officers and the public can remember peace officers who have given their lives in the performance of their duties in Ontario."

I wholeheartedly sign this petition in full support and ask members to do so, as I pass it to Philip.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I'm happy to present a petition:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas gasoline prices have continued to increase at alarming rates in recent months; and

"Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario's drivers while also impacting the Ontario

economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation; and

"Whereas the member from Superior North and the member from Essex, as well as the current ministers from St. Catharines, Eglinton–Lawrence and Sudbury have introduced legislation to freeze gas prices;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario consider an immediate temporary gas price freeze and fair and transparent gasoline pricing by supporting the previous members' bills while international gas prices stabilize: Bill 10, the Gas Price Watchdog Act, introduced by the Liberal member for Thunder Bay–Superior North; Bill 18, the Gas Price Watchdog Act, introduced by the honourable Liberal member for Eglinton–Lawrence; Bill 80, the Gasoline Consumer Protection Act, introduced by the Liberal member for Essex; Bill 32, the Petroleum Products Price Freeze Act, introduced by the honourable Liberal member from Sudbury; and Bill 16, the Gasoline Pricing Act, introduced by the honourable Liberal member from St. Catharines."

I affix my name in full support.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Gosh, Speaker, you look just like the guy who read a petition a moment ago.

I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that was sent by dozens of people in the Niagara area through my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I send greetings to my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls. I'm pleased to affix my signature and to ask page Arianne to carry it for me.

1520

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a "Petition to Ontario Legislature to End Discrimination." It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government already fully funds 93% of faith-based schools in Ontario, but the remaining 7% receive no funding, solely because they are not Catholic;

"Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled in 1999 and again in 2005 that this arrangement is discriminatory and violates basic international human rights law that Ontario formally agreed to uphold;

"Whereas all three parties represented in the Legislature support Catholic separate school funding, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Canada, so that the only fair and viable solution to the discrimination is to extend funding to the small religious minorities that are currently excluded;

"Whereas the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Ontario has the constitutional power to provide funding to non-Catholic faith-based schools;

"Whereas Ontario is the only Western democracy that fully funds faith-based schools of one religion to the total exclusion of all other religions, while all other provinces in Canada except for the Atlantic provinces fund faith-based schools and have thriving public school systems;

"Whereas the cultural survival of the affected minority groups is at stake;

"Whereas faith-based schools produce responsible and productive citizens; and

"Whereas the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Religious Schools in December 2004 submitted to the Minister of Education a detailed proposal for the funding of non-Catholic faith-based schools in a manner that is fair, accountable and protects and enhances the public interest;

"We call on the Ontario Legislature to pass legislation to provide equitable funding in respect of all faith-based schools in Ontario without religious discrimination and without any reduction in funding for public education, with accountability requirements and standards in place to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded."

I fully support this petition and gladly affix my name to it and give it to page Daniel to deliver to the table.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition here. It was prepared by my wife, Michelle Berardinetti, and it's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. She should have sent it a few days ago, but it has arrived today.

"Whereas the province of Ontario in its last budget allocated in excess of \$2 billion for public transit expansion across Ontario;

"Whereas the majority of these funds are slated for subway expansion to York University up to the city of Vaughan;

"Whereas the city of Toronto has not yet acted on determining what it plans to do with the antiquated Scarborough LRT;

"Whereas the issue of resolving Scarborough's LRT, along with a transit growth strategy for Scarborough, was

not adequately addressed in the TTC's latest transit growth strategy document;

"Whereas the current transit regime designed for Scarborough does not actively promote nor encourage increased ridership;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure that new provincial monies received by the TTC for transit upgrades and expansion go towards addressing the transit shortcomings in Scarborough."

I strongly support this petition, Mr. Speaker. I affix my signature to it and pass it on to you.

ONTARIO PHARMACISTS

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition to do with the viability of small, independent pharmacists and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government passed the Transparent Drug System for Patients Act; and

"Whereas as a result of the regulations of the bill, generic drug companies are required to supply drugs at the cost prescribed by the government; and

"Whereas generic companies have not agreed to these terms; and

"Whereas pharmacists are required to purchase the drugs at prices set by the generic companies; and

"Whereas the government's new formulary does not fully reimburse pharmacists for the cost of drugs; and

"Whereas the government has removed the 'cost to operator' provision; and

"Whereas pharmacists are forced to either lose money or bill patients for the actual cost of the drugs; and

"Whereas the viability of small, independent pharmacists is being threatened through the government's actions;

"Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government immediately return the 'cost to operator' provision, thereby guaranteeing affordable access to medication for all patients."

I support this petition.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada's first Nobel Prize recipient; and

"Whereas this great Canadian's original homestead, located in the town of New Tecumseth"—Alliston—"is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

"Whereas the town of New Tecumseth has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the

public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Culture endorse Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson's private member's bill entitled the Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act so that the homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come."

I, of course, agree with this petition and signed it, and want to note that the Ontario Historical Society has sold the homestead. Shame on them.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wish to give notice of my dissatisfaction with the response to my question of the Minister of Natural Resources to do with funding the fish and wildlife program.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on that point of order: I want to file a notice of dissatisfaction about the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): That is not a point of order.

Do you want to give that to the Clerk? Okay.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: One moment.

Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Lanark–Carleton has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of the Environment concerning the Carp dump. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

The Chair recognizes the deputy House leader.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I'd like to rise pursuant to standing order 55 and give the Legislature the business of the House for next week.

On Monday, December 18, 2006, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 173, the Legislative Assembly Statute Law Amendment Act; in the evening, third reading of Bill 130, the Municipal Statute Law Amendment Act.

On Tuesday, December 19, in the afternoon, to be confirmed; the evening will be confirmed.

On Wednesday, December 20, 2006, the afternoon and the evening are both to be confirmed.

On Thursday, December 21, both afternoon and evening are also to be confirmed.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of

Natural Resources concerning funding for the fish and wildlife program. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFERENDUM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE RÉFÉRENDUM RELATIF AU SYSTÈME ÉLECTORAL

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 28, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario's electoral system / Projet de loi 155, Loi prévoyant un référendum sur le système électoral de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Debate? The Chair recognizes the member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I've been looking forward, actually, to participating in this debate. This is an issue that members of this House have heard me and others in my caucus and, I would argue, probably some others around here speak about on a whole number of occasions, and that is the issue of electoral reform.

I've felt for years that the system that we have now of first-past-the-post is one that at the time that it was designed worked well. It was done for a reason. But in a modern democracy such as we have today, where Legislatures have to deal with very difficult questions and we're talking about much larger budgets than we did in the past, I think it's much more important that we have an electoral system that at the end of the day will give you a certain proportionality to represent what the actual percentage of vote was inside your communities. It would be really nice to see in this Legislature, at the end, that if a party got 45% of the vote, 45% of the seats in that House would be represented by that party etc., and the only time a government would get a clear majority is if more than 50% of the public actually voted for them. What a wonderful thing that would be, because it would allow us and force us, quite frankly, to work together. Let me give you a couple of examples, and then I'll talk a little bit more specifically about the bill.

There have been times in this Legislature where we've had very controversial issues that have been brought before us, but because the government has a majority, they are able to use that majority to do sometimes what the public doesn't want or is sometimes completely opposite to what they promised in an election. If you had a system of proportionality, it would mean that a government would have to, at the very end, get the support of at least one opposition party or a combination of those members to pass whatever initiative.

1530

Let me give you an example. I remember a very difficult debate in this House for many people on the amal-

gamation of the cities. The government of the day, under Mike Harris, wanted to amalgamate Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, Sudbury and many others, and the people in those communities had referendums—those who did—and voted against the idea of amalgamation. The government ended up ignoring the referendums and used the majority in order to create what we have now, the greater cities of Toronto, Sudbury, Hamilton and Ottawa, even though the citizens in those communities who are the ratepayers, who pay the taxes, said by way of referendum that they didn't want that to happen.

At least in a system of proportionality in this House, if the Conservatives of the day thought it was such a good idea, they would have had to come to the New Democrats, or the Liberals, at that time in opposition, to get us to support it so they'd have at least 50%. It would force us, in the opposition, to be a little bit more reflective in trying to figure out how to work with the government, because at times they would need to come to us for support, and obviously that would give us an ability to get things back. It would mean that members have to work together.

I listened to the debate where members have said, "Well, there are really bad examples. Look at Israel." I will argue that Israel is what she is today because of proportional representation. That country would never be able to govern itself in the climate that they are in unless it had PR because it allows them to pull together coalitions that are necessary to find a way to govern themselves. Others have talked about Italy. People don't understand the history of Italy. Italy was a whole bunch of city states and didn't become a nation until quite recently, actually. The actual date was 1870. What happened was that there were coalitions of left, centre, right—various coalitions—that came together to form a government, and Italy is doing quite well through that system of election that they have.

I would argue that there are better examples. I'm just using those that people like to point at as being bad ones. I would also point to the very strong ones, such as Australia and Germany. They have a mixed system of proportional representation that has served those democracies well. I will only say this: At the end of the day, those are among the strongest economic powerhouses in the world, and they govern under a system of proportional representation.

To this bill: This bill will allow the government to set the question. We're having our citizens' assemblies. Lise Breton, from my riding, and others are meeting with the public to get recommendations on what should be proposed as far as a concept for what type of model we want. That question is going to be put on the ballot in the 2007 election.

The problem with this bill is that the government is saying that the only way the referendum in the 2007 election is going to pass and be supported is if you get 60% of the vote, I believe, in two thirds of the ridings and 60% overall. I'm just saying that, to me, this is very anti-democratic. For example, in Canada, we've seen

Newfoundland join Canada under a principle of 50% plus one. If we had gone to Newfoundland and said, "60% plus one," they'd still be out as a colony of England. It was a very bitter referendum debate and campaign they had back in—

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): In 1949.

Mr. Bisson: —in 1949—I was trying to remember the date—where it ended up being 51% that the Newfoundlanders voted to join Canada. If it hadn't been for that—in other words, if you had this law in place—Newfoundland would still be sitting on the outside.

Every other concept that we have in our democracy is 50% plus one. When we go and vote as workers on our collective agreement to ratify or reject an agreement, the majority is 50% plus one. It's not 60%; it's 50% plus one. I've been in situations where I've been happy with an agreement or unhappy with an agreement, and at the end of the day, it's the members who speak—50% plus one—and that's the way it works. If this government argues that we should have a threshold that's 60% of the overall vote, with two thirds of the ridings being in the affirmative, they're telling you what they want in the end, and that is the status quo. Why? Because it suits the government, in the sense that they believe they will govern again, and they would like to have a clear majority in order to continue doing what it is they're doing.

The other part of this bill that I think is problematic is that even though we've put together these citizens' assemblies, they're not going to give the citizens' assemblies the ability to figure out what the regulations are vis-à-vis how the bill will be enacted. The government is giving themselves that power and they're basically, like King John, going to decide at the end of the day what is to happen.

I wanted to put those couple of things on the record.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: I should finish on that point, actually. I wanted to put those things on the record.

As I was saying earlier, and I was reminded by my good friend Mr. Prue, at the end of the day it's not the citizens' assembly that will set the question. They will go out and do all the hard work that has to be done, they will turn their attention to what they think they're hearing from people and give a recommendation, but at the end of the day the minister can just disavow anything that's happened at the citizens' assembly and can herself set the question, which may not be the question that the citizens' assembly wanted in the first place. So I say to them, why are you doing that? That's wrong.

Je voudrais finir sur ce point-ci, qui est l'ouvrage sur lequel les comités des citoyens travaillent présentement. J'ai eu la chance de parler à Lise Breton, qui est notre représentante sur le comité. Je peux vous dire que ce monde-là est en train de prendre très au sérieux l'ouvrage qui lui a été donné. Ce monde-là essaie de se pencher sur la question que cette Assemblée lui a donné pour voir ce qu'on doit faire : est-ce que le système présent est adéquat? Sinon, y a-t-il d'autres systèmes ou idées qu'on peut regarder pour bâtir un système électoral qui

représente mieux les citoyens et regarder quels modèles feraient du bon sens pour l'Ontario à la fin de la journée?

Je peux dire que ce monde-là, qui travaille sur ces comités, sont très intéressés à quoi faire. Ils sont très dévoués au travail qui leur a été donné et ils le prennent tellement au sérieux. Il ne faut pas donner à ce monde-là l'impression qu'à la fin de la journée l'ouvrage qu'ils vont faire ne veut rien dire, en disant que la ministre va décider ce que c'est la question et que le référendum peut être accepté seulement avec 60 %.

Donc je dis, de la part de ceux qui ont été choisis au hasard pour nous représenter sur ces comités, qu'il faut leur donner le respect et l'habileté de faire ce qu'ils ont à faire sur leur comité, écouter attentivement ce qu'ils nous disent et leur donner au moins l'habileté d'influencer ce que la question va être sur le référendum à l'automne, en octobre 2007.

Sur ce, je veux dire que j'aimerais finalement voir changer le système. Mais le projet de loi qu'on a présentement n'est pas, très franchement, adéquat en donnant à la ministre tous les pouvoirs et qu'elle peut faire ce qu'elle veut sans écouter les personnes qui travaillent sur ce dossier.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Mrs. Bountrogianni has moved second reading of Bill 155. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members; there will be a 30-minute bell.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): May I interrupt, Speaker?

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the House whip.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: "Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on the motion by Minister Bountrogianni for the second reading of Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario's electoral system, be deferred until deferred votes on December 18, 2006."

It is signed by David Levac, MPP, chief government whip.

Orders of the day?

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): I move adjournment of the House.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): No. Liberals don't want to work.

The Acting Speaker: Order. When a motion to adjourn the House carries before the usual 6 p.m. adjournment hour, a scheduled adjournment debate late show is automatically carried over to the next sessional day on which such debates are held, which is Tuesday. Therefore, the late shows originally scheduled today are carried to Tuesday, in the event of passage of the motion to adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until Monday, December 18, 2006, at 1:30 p.m. of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1539.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. James K. Bartleman

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown

Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Algoma-Manitoulin	Brown, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (L) Speaker / Président	Haliburton-Victoria-Brock	Scott, Laurie (PC)
Ancaster-Dundas- Flamborough-Aldershot	McMeekin, Ted (L)	Halton	Chudleigh, Ted (PC)
Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC) Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Hamilton East / Hamilton-Est	Horwath, Andrea (ND)
Beaches-East York / Beaches-York-Est	Prue, Michael (ND)	Hamilton Mountain	Bountrogianni, Hon. / L'hon. Marie (L) Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Bramalea-Gore-Malton- Springdale	Kular, Kuldip (L)	Hamilton West / Hamilton-Ouest	Marsales, Judy (L)
Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L) Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga	Dhillon, Vic (L)	Huron-Bruce	Mitchell, Carol (L)
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Milloy, John (L)
Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Van Bommel, Maria (L)
Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, deputy government House leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement	Lanark-Carleton	Sterling, Norman W. (PC)
Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Leeds-Grenville	Runciman, Robert W. (PC)
Dufferin-Peel- Wellington-Grey	Tory, John (PC) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Matthews, Deborah (L)
Durham	O'Toole, John (PC)	London West / London-Ouest	Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (L) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Eglinton-Lawrence	Colle, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (L) Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration	London-Fanshawe	Ramal, Khalil (L)
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L) Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Tim (PC)	Mississauga East / Mississauga-Est	Fonseca, Peter (L)
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Peterson, Tim (L)
Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports	Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Nepean-Carleton	MacLeod, Lisa (PC)
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (L) Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Niagara Falls	Craiton, Kim (L)
Guelph-Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)	Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)
Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)	Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)
		Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)	Stormont–Dundas– Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior- Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L) Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Ottawa–Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Ottawa–Vanier	Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L) Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Toronto–Danforth	Tabuns, Peter (ND)
Parkdale–High Park	DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Trinity–Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Parry Sound–Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Sorbara, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (L) Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Perth–Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Waterloo–Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	Whitby–Ajax	Elliott, Christine (PC)
Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Prince Edward–Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	Windsor–St. Clair	Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L) Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Sarnia–Lambton	Di Cocco, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (L) Minister of Culture / ministre de la Culture	York Centre / York-Centre	Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Sault Ste. Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	York North / York-Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	York West / York-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse	Burlington	Vacant
Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	Markham	Vacant
Scarborough–Agincourt	Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L) Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Vacant
Scarborough–Rouge River	Balkissoon, Bas (L)		
Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)		
Simcoe–Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St. Catharines	Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L) Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, government House leader / ministre du Tourisme, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées, leader parlementaire du gouvernement		
St. Paul's	Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L) Attorney General / procureur général		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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